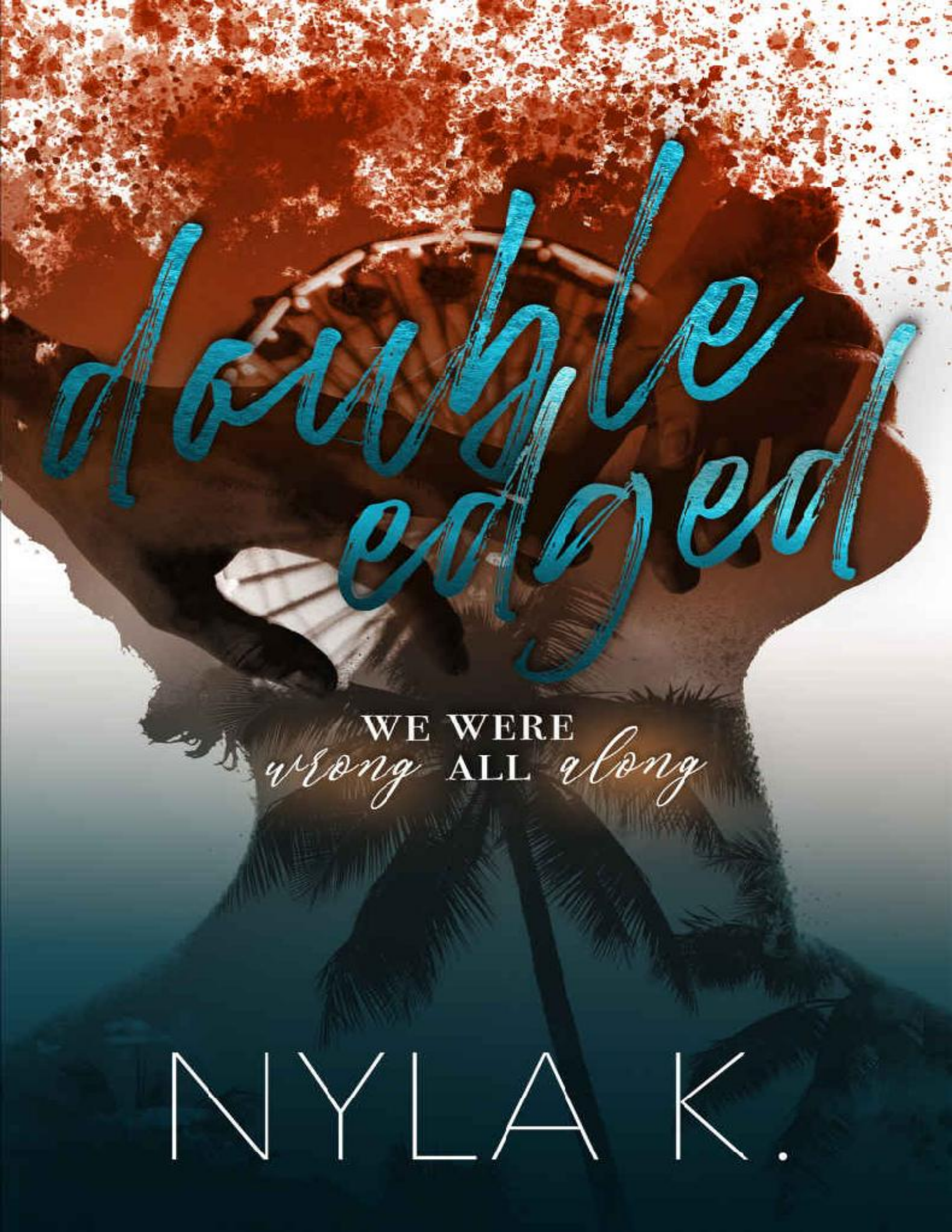

double edged
WE WERE
wrong ALL along
NYLA K.

DOUBLE-EDGED

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CONTENTS

Blurb
Foreword
Playlist

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25
Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30
Chapter 31

Tauren’s Epilogue
Colson’s Epilogue
Cyrus’s Epilogue

Author’s Note
Acknowledgments
Resources
More Stories by Nyla K
About the Author
Social Media

OceanofPDF.com

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BLURB

What's an honest man to do?

Isn't that always the question we find ourselves wondering when we get swept up in something bad... Something overpowering and tangibly wrong, with the ability to corrupt our morals down to the core?

These boys, they're not mine, but they might as well be. I'm responsible for them, in a sense. And they couldn't be more different, identical in looks alone.

One I've noticed... The other has noticed *me*.

One needs me, the other needs him.

Sometimes a hero will fall on his own sword, but in my case... I've fallen on two.

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To the emo kids, and the nerds…
The misfits, the underdogs, and the losers.
Throw your middle fingers in the air, baby.
Show the world your imperfect…

Your twisted, broken, proud fucking smiles.

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FOREWORD

This book will absolutely, and *undoubtedly*, not be for everyone.

It is, of course, wildly different from all the rest of my stories. And I would like to make sure that you, the reader, are aware of what you're going into.

This book contains *taboo themes* that some of you will find delicious, and maybe even mild. Because as we all know, *taboo*, like dark romance, is quite subjective. Maybe some of you like to read things that push boundaries down to your gut. You like to squirm uncomfortably when you read romance. If so, this will be for you. And like I said, it might even be no biggie for a black-souled badass like you.

But to the rest, those uncomfy squirms could be triggering, or make you upset.

I hope that if you've made it this far, especially if you've read my books before, you'll see how very necessary the relationship is between our characters. This is not taboo for the sake of being taboo. It is *not* written for shock value.

The brothers in this story have a very complicated relationship that certainly falls outside of what society deems *normal* or *appropriate*. If that sounds bad to you, then I beg of you… ***Do not read any further.***

I'm not talking about a few measly sexual encounters, either. I'm talking about an actual, honest-to-God relationship building between two boys who share blood. There will be no plot twist at the end proving them unrelated. They're very much twins. So I say again…

If that is something that makes you say, *ew*, or *gross*… Walk away. Please.

This is not the only taboo aspect of the book. It also contains a rather large age gap between the boys and their stepfather. So if large gaps in age aren't your cup of tea either, well, I'm not sure how you found me, but I'd urge you not to continue.

I really don't want to say much more than that, because I hate spoiling the story. I don't want anyone picking up this book thinking it's something it's not. But I also think your mind should be open enough to accept that things are rarely what they seem, and the lines between *right* and *wrong* can easily become blurred. That's what *Double-edged* it about.

It is not a dark romance per se, but the story does contain very serious mental health factors that could trigger some readers and/or make you uneasy.

Regardless of it all, you should go into this the way you'd go into any of my other books; with a wide-open brain. That said, you're entitled to feel however this book makes you feel. But if I could ask of you one thing, please don't be the person who reads this foreword and ignores it, even though you know the things I've mentioned will trigger you.

And if you do decide to give it a go despite my warnings, I'd like not to be blamed or trashed because of all the things I just mentioned. Obviously, it's not really my call, but I'm just asking here.

There's no shame in bowing out, because not every book will be for everyone.

I say again… ***Not every reader likes every book***. It's simply illogical.

But if you're at all interested in dancing on that blurred line, welcome.

We're excited to have you.

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PLAYLIST



"Turn on one of those sexy little playlists of yours…
Let's rage."

Listen in full on Spotify

***parents* - YUNGBLUD**
***California* - girlfriends**
***Dirty Little Secret* - The All-American Rejects**
***THATS WHAT I WANT* - Lil Nas X**
***Bouncing Off The Walls* - Sugarcult**
***hope for the underrated youth* - YUNGBLUD**
***@ my worst* - blackbear**
***Rebel Rebel* - David Bowie**
***Friends* - Chase Atlantic**
***Strawberries & Cigarettes* - Troye Sivan**
***Hate The Way* - G-Eazy feat. blackbear**
***Taker Not A Giver* - Northstar**
***Bones* - MOD SUN**
***Don't Freak Out* - Huddy, inn dior, Tyson Ritter & Travis Barker**
***Ever So Sweet* (Acoustic) - The Early November**
***Helena* - My Chemical Romance**
***Poetic Tragedy* - The Used**
***The Kill (Bury Me)* - Thirty Seconds To Mars**

***Lower Your Eyelids To Die With The Sun* - M83**
***Gravity (*Live at the House of Blues) - John Mayer**
Empathy* (Acoustic) - *Point North
***Broken Whiskey Glass* - Post Malone**
***Drown* - Bring Me The Horizon**
***Breathing* - Lifehouse**
***Heavier* - Rain City Drive**
***LIFE AFTER SALEM* - Lil Nas X**
***Into The Dark* (Acoustic) - Point North**
***And the Hero Will Drown* - Story Of The Year**
***Terrible Things* - Mayday Parade**
***You And Me* - Lifehouse**
***The Adventure* - Angels & Airwaves**
***Hammer* - Point North**
***Only One (*Acoustic) - Yellowcard**

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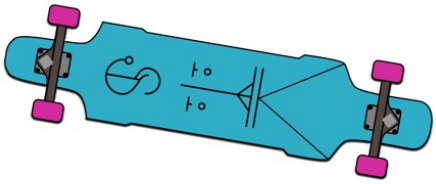
“You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain.”

-Harvey Dent, *The Dark Knight*

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1

CYRUS



E*mbarrassing.*

This whole night, this whole stupid thing… It's just so humiliating.

Kicking rocks up the walkway to the front door, I pause before reaching the steps. My eyes close slowly, fluttering in my state of bound confusion. I feel lost, and stupid. I feel like a *kid*, and I hate that.

I'm fifteen… almost sixteen. In some places, that's an adult. Plus, I'm smart. Added maturity and all that.

But while I do *despise* being treated like a child, I'm also not sure it's entirely necessary to be dealing with these grown-up things either.

I don't want to be worrying about stuff like this.

For now, my worries should be on school, my grades, my homework and extracurriculars. Making sure everything is ready for my guaranteed ride to UCLA. I barely even want to think about my home life, which, let's be real, has never been great.

This is stress a teenager really doesn't need. I just want to read in my room; history books and graphic novels.

Does sex really matter?

I guess it does, in the grand scheme, but *I* don't want to think about it. Not as much as my friends do, apparently.

I'm still just swaying outside the door of my house, knowing that when I come inside, unexpectedly early, I'll need to answer questions about why I'm home *now*, and not tomorrow afternoon, like originally planned.

I can probably make up an excuse to Mom and Dad. I'll tell them I forgot about a project I want to get a head-start on. It's sort of far-fetched since I never forget about projects. But they'll buy that I'd rather be in my room on a Saturday night doing homework than sleeping over Jared's house. They won't think twice.

My brother will, though.

Colson will know right away something happened. That's what I'm dreading more than anything else. Admitting things to him is always difficult…

Rubbing my eyes with my fingers, my mind flashes back to an hour ago, in Jared's basement. We were just hanging out, watching movies and eating too many snacks. The guys snuck beers from Jared's dad's fridge in the garage, but I wasn't partaking. I'm not a drinker…

Still, it was fine. *Casual.*

But then the conversation turned to girls, and then to hooking up with girls; two things I know absolutely nothing about. It made me uncomfortable. And then I got *awkward.*

When I get awkward, I keep my mouth shut. It's the only thing I can do. Usually, it works well enough… Playing the wallflower. At this point, who are we kidding? I'm not *playing*.

But tonight… they just wouldn't let it go.

They've all hooked up with girls, at the very least kissed them. And if they haven't, they lie like they have. That's probably what I *should* have done, instead of just leaving like the quiet loner nerd everyone already thinks I am.

That's right. I felt so awkward that I actually just left, without a word. *Pathetic*, I'd heard one of them whisper while I climbed the steps, hightailing it out of there as fast as my legs would carry me, rather than faking something I know nothing about.

Girls. I don't get them. I mean, I don't *get* them, but I also don't *understand* them.

I've never once looked at a girl and thought, *Yum. I want to suck her lips*. That just seems like something I wouldn't be very good at. And I enjoy sticking to things I know I can excel in, like math and science.

Yea, you're right. I'm a fucking nerd. *But at least I own it.*

Kissing in general hasn't been at the top of my priorities list. I've been more focused on school; mastering chemistry and studying microbiology.

Reading Sci-fi and comics in my spare time. I've thought about kissing before, sure, but only a few times.

After waking up from a sticky dream, like the one last night…

I sigh out loud and stare at my front door. I'll have to go inside, eventually.

I'll have to kiss a girl, eventually. My stomach bunches up in dread.

The only girls I like, as more than just friendly acquaintances from school, are fictional. I like Catwoman, and Rogue, because they're cool and pretty badass. But I don't want to *kiss* them.

Bruce Wayne, on the other hand…

A tight, suffocating squeeze grips at my chest and I rub a hand over it.

In my dream last night, I was Robin.

Batman and I were making an escape after defeating some goons in an alley. We reached a safe spot and stopped, breathless from running and climbing and swinging.

Batman is older than me, older than *Robin*, obviously. But in my dream, he saw me for who I was. To him, it didn't matter that I'm technically a *kid*. He saw my mind and what I have to offer. He *valued* me. And he's the Caped Crusader, so his opinion is an important one.

A large, black-gloved hand rested on my shoulder while he stood before me, eyes shining from beneath that mask. I remember smelling him in my dream, like strength and masculinity.

He smelled *so* good.

The hand drifted down my chest…

And I woke up sweating, with my boxers sticking to me.

Fuck my life.

Finally biting the bullet, I unlock the front door and step inside, propping my longboard against the wall in the foyer. I close the door quietly, though the place is big enough that no one will hear me from here, especially at this time of night. They're all probably in their respective corners of the house. Dad's probably in his office, like always.

Most of the downstairs is dimly lit. It's only eleven, but now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure Mom is out with friends. Shuffling toward the stairs, I stomp up them, scolding myself internally while I make a beeline to my bedroom up the hall.

I don't know why I'm still surprised by feeling like this. I've always been an outsider. You'd think I'd be used to it by now. Colson is the popular

one, not me.

I don't have many friends. The only reason I even hang out with those guys is because we grew up near one another. We all live in the same rich neighborhood, and our parents know each other.

Friends by association.

Inside my room with the door closed, I start to feel it. My insecurities come creeping out of the cage of my mind, and then the self-loathing and inner berating begins.

You're such a loser.

You have no friends.

You're a freak, a nerd, a weirdo. And everything about you sucks.

I kick off my shoes and they bang against the wall as I rip my hair with my fists. Why can't I just be like them?

Why can't I feel the same as everyone else? Just… fit the fuck in.

My ass crashes onto my bed and I hold my face, breathing unsteadily.

The sound of my bedroom door opening brings with it that unsettling flutter, which is becoming familiar to me.

I hear him walk inside and close the door behind him. I hear him stepping closer. And I *feel* him watching me. I feel him all the time, whether he's miles away, or standing right in front of me, gazing with curious eyes.

My chin tilts upward as I uncover my face to find myself staring back at me. It's not *me*, though. He just looks exactly like me.

"Why are you home?" The rumbling voice, exactly the same as my own, although somehow harboring a bit of grunge I don't possess, ripples into my ears. I used to think maybe his voice dropped before mine. But he also talks more than I do.

Screams *much* more.

I consider how to answer his question for a moment. After all, he'll know if I'm lying.

"I wasn't feeling it…" I mutter, dropping my gaze. My eyes stick to his Converse sneakers, all ripped up everywhere and colored with black sharpie.

"Why not?" Colson folds his arms over his chest in my peripheral.

I shrug. I don't want to get into it… Especially not with him.

A sigh comes out of him, and he takes a seat next to me on the bed. His warmth immediately sets an ache in my chest, and a growing pit in my stomach I keep fighting to ignore.

“I told you those guys are pricks.” He nudges my shoulder with his and I can’t help but puff out an incredulous chuckle.

Pivoting my face to his once more, I find his eyes assessing me. Making sure I’m alright, in a way, as if he’s my *older* brother, looking to console me. Colson has always felt older, and I’m not sure how it happened. We’re the exact same age.

Technically, I’m five minutes older than him.

But it’s never seemed that way. He’s the one who comforts *me*, who teases me. Who makes me feel…

I swallow hard, and his eyes fall.

“You gonna give me the names, or should I plan on bashing all of their faces in on Monday?” he asks. There’s humor hidden beneath the surface, but not enough. I’m sure he’s fully serious.

Colson’s earned his reputation in our school. When we were eleven, this kid Jordie tripped me in the hallway. By the next period, Colson had stuffed him in a trash barrel and rolled it down a hill.

“It wasn’t like that,” I tell him. “They know better.”

“Then why are you home?” he asks again, and heated embarrassment rushes to my cheeks before I even say the words.

“They were talking about girls… About hooking up with girls.” My voice scrapes, fingers twisting in my lap. “It made me uncomfortable, so I left.”

I hear all the questions anyone else would ask in my mind.

What’s the big deal?

Why don’t you want to talk about hooking up?

Why didn’t you just lie?

But my twin brother doesn’t ask any of those questions, because he already knows what’s in my head. In my *heart*. He knows me, in all the ways no one else ever will.

We’re different people, but we’re connected.

And so rather than asking me anything, he slides a hand onto my knee.

“You’ll never be able to talk about hooking up if you don’t do it.”

My heart is instantly leaping into my ribs.

“I don’t care about it, though,” I mumble, knowing it won’t make him stop what he’s doing. If anything, it’ll make him do it more.

Colson likes to play games. And more recently, most of them seem to include me.

His fingers run a line up my thigh, and my spine stiffens. They move up my shirt, barely ghosting over the flesh beneath the fabric while an odd sensation simmers in my veins like poison. It's shame… and something else. Something I think I've felt before, though I force myself *never* to think about it.

Leaning in closer, he whispers, "Because you've never done it," by my ear.

A hard twitch happens in my pants and my eyes slam shut. *No*. No, this is bad. This is *wrong*.

"I don't care." I repeat myself, way too breathy this time. I feel like it's super obvious that he's getting to me, and I hate it. *I'm not supposed to react this way.* "I don't need to kiss anyone."

"I say again… because you've never done it before." His warm cinnamon breath hits my face. "It's pretty fun."

"Col… please…" I whimper, begging him to stop.

We're not supposed to do this. I know it, and he knows it.

What we did the other night… the line we've apparently crossed… It's so wrong. As badly as I secretly want it, I can't let this happen.

Bad bad bad.

Still, this is different from that. We've never actually touched *each other* before. Because we *can't*.

"Well, if you're gonna beg…" He smirks, lips brushing my cheek.

"I'm not… I don't…" I'm flustered beyond belief, which I think is just egging him on even more.

Colson likes the chase, something I've been learning more and more lately.

"What's the problem?" he murmurs, his voice rumbling into me, causing another thump in my jeans. "I helped you the other night, right?"

When I don't answer right away, his other hand appears on my face. It's gentle, tender in its pulling, tugging me so I'm forced to look at him.

Like looking into a bizarro mirror. He's me, only wicked.

I nod slowly. "Well… yea. But I don't think we should—"

"The reason why you feel like such an inexperienced baby is because you need to just get it over with. You're putting too much pressure on your first kiss, Cy."

I swallow hard, our eyes locked in a conflict of tactics; my peace to his war.

“Just do it,” he grumbles, a whispered command. I shake my head subtly, eyes locked on his pink lips. He wets them with his tongue. “Do it.”

A strange fear whips up with the tickling in my stomach, bleeding together into something nefarious; tangibly tempting mixed with how purely awful it is that I want it.

It’s the *good* bad.

Instinctually, I nod a little, inching closer. My lashes flutter.

And just as I’m considering working up to it, Colson yanks me to his mouth.

I’m on a rollercoaster.

On the Ferris wheel at Santa Monica Pier, looking down from the top.

The ocean breeze is on my face.

My brother’s lips feel so soft beneath mine, his fingers threading in my hair while we both part. I don’t know how to kiss, that much is clear. But Colson does.

He sucks my lower lip into his mouth and an unwitting hum flees mine, taking up refuge in that hot, wet haven of his.

“Suck my lip like that,” he breathes, an instruction.

So I do.

A small breath gusts from his lips. And then he bites me.

Not hard, but enough to startle me, and I flinch.

A chuckle rumbles from within his chest. “A little sting feels good… Doesn’t it?”

I can’t help but nod.

I’m painfully aware of how hard I am. It’s never been like this before. Not when I imagine... Not even for Bruce fucking Wayne.

This is so *new*, it’s terrifying. But I think Colson’s been doing things like this for a while. Because he’s not scared. He’s taking over.

And I think he likes that I’m afraid.

My brother pushes me backward, crawling over me slowly while his mouth advances on mine. The sounds of us panting are ringing through the room like broken church bells. My hands lie limp at my sides, while his hold my face and my throat.

His tongue slides between my lips and touches mine. I whimper.

“Tongue, Cyrus,” he demands and I give it to him, sliding carefully inside to meet his. And when they touch, his teeth scrape my lower lip, pulling and nipping it.

Okay… So this is why the guys like kissing so much.

It lives up to the hype.

My hips move, chasing a desperate craving I need fulfilled, my body acting on its own while I heat up to the point of stifling inside my clothes.

This is so wrong. So bad.

My friends were talking about kissing girls. Not *boys*.

Not their brothers.

I try to pull back, my hazy gaze taking in the sight above me.

Me. It's me.

Bad me.

"You like it," he rasps, coming back to my mouth, taking over my lips like they belong to him. "I know how much you do…"

I think maybe they do.

A sudden sound breaks the spell like a record scratch.

The door.

A snarling curse.

And before I know what's happening, my twin brother is being yanked off me by our father.

Dad grips Colson's throat and throws him up against the wall. He hits him.

He hits him again.

And again.

A wave of shock, shame, and remorse has frozen me in time, wide, watering eyes looking on as our father beats the fuck out of my brother. I can barely process what he's saying, his shouts and roars of rage. But the scattered words I do hear are devastating.

You sick fuck! You twisted disgusting faggot!

What are you doing to your brother?!

My head shakes, over and over and over. My lips tremble, tears rolling down my cheeks.

He didn't do it. It wasn't his fault.

Stop!

But I can't speak. I can't move.

After all, this is what happens when you let yourself out.

This is what comes from the good bad.

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2

COLSON



This place blows.

Sucking in a long drag of my cigarette, I puff the smoke out through the cracked window, staring outside at the snow-covered trees.

If I were back home, it'd be sunny right now. I could walk on the beach in a hoodie and be fully comfortable.

I could see my brother.

But no. Instead, I'm stuck in this bullshit boarding school, where I've been for the last month. Just because my dad walked in on something that's none of his concern.

I roll my eyes while smoking more of my cigarette. My father is the worst.

He's such a rich, entitled prick. He thinks that just because he makes money—millions of dollars of it—that he can treat everyone like they're resources. He's always been this way, since as long as I can remember.

Cyrus and I were raised by nannies. Our father is the ultimate detached workaholic, and our mother, well… The moment she popped us out of her womb, one after the other, she was done. Of course I don't remember that far back, but I just know it's true, based on her sterling personality.

The second Cy and I were out of her vag, she probably handed us off to the au pair and said, *take care of this, won't you? And get me a Bloody Mary.*

I was almost shocked that Dad even gave enough of a fuck to open Cyrus's door that night a month ago. But of course, when it comes to their *prized possession*, they have to pay the bare minimum of attention.

Because Cyrus is the golden child. The smart one.

He's going places, they always say. *Cyrus Becker will change the world.*

I'm still waiting for someone to say something nice about me. *Anything will do.*

It's not that I resent my brother. He's smart as hell, and I admire him for it. If anything, I resent everyone else in the world. For putting so much pressure on him, and absolutely none on me.

I think I could deal with a little pressure. Who knows? I might like it.

As soon as my bruises healed, my father shipped me off to this ridiculous all-boy school for troubled teens in Lake Tahoe. For no other reason than he wants to keep me as far away from my brother as possible. And my dad's obviously not very smart, because I'm only a couple of hours from home.

If he really wanted to separate us, he'd send me to Timbuktu or some shit.

I'm glad he didn't.

I considered breaking the fuck out of this shithole myself. It really wouldn't be difficult. But then there are easier ways of getting home. I already have two strikes on my record. One for sneaking in cigarettes, which they've clearly done a great job of stopping. And one for vandalizing the main office. *That was fun.*

One more strike and, as they say in the most boring sport ever… I'm *out*.

I'm not usually this much of a hellion. Don't get me wrong, I can be a problem child when I need to be, but really, I just want to keep to myself. I want to play my guitar, skateboard, and not be separated from my twin brother. That's it. Challenge any of those things, and I'll do what I need to.

Don't these jerks know by now? An animal will only lash out when it feels cornered, or is protecting its family.

My inevitable expulsion from boarding school couldn't come sooner. I've had enough of the bullshit in this place. I miss my freedom.

I miss my car, the BMW I drive even though I don't technically have my license yet. I miss fast food, and my skateboard, and my guitar.

But mostly… I miss Cyrus.

My brother is a part of me. We've been two halves of the same whole since the day we were born, and that's a connection that few people will understand. Especially not my dumbass prick of a father.

Tossing my cigarette out the window, I pull it shut and look around the empty hallway. I'm not supposed to be in here after lights out, but it's amazing what a few bucks to the orderlies will get you around here.

Strolling casually back to my bedroom, I take one last lingering look around. The place isn't awful, since this is where rich parents send their delinquent kids who won't act the way they want us to. The tuition is like twenty-five grand a semester, so obviously it's not a dump.

But the fact remains… I don't want to be here.

I know what I did with Cyrus was wrong. I get that. I'm not a psychopath.

But they never even tried to see it from my point of view. Not that they would understand it even if they had.

Cyrus needs me. He's too smart for his own good. He overthinks everything, and he's sensitive. His social anxiety makes it really difficult for him to make friends, and that's fine. Truthfully, I like having him to myself. I've always loved being the center of his world.

So what my dad and these other dumbasses would see as *inappropriate* behavior is just me protecting him. I'll never let anyone make my brother feel like he's less than them. He's a genius. So what if making friends and forming relationships isn't his forte?

That's what he has me for.

While I walk back to my bed, I leave a glare on my roommate, Kyle Beckwith. My lips curl into a knowing smirk as I crawl back into bed. My time here is coming to an end. I can't wait to toss up the middle finger to all these assholes. My father especially.

I manage to settle into some easy sleep for a couple of hours, during which I think I have a dream about being back home with Cyrus. But when I wake up, I can't remember it.

In this place, they wake us up at six in the morning like we're in prison or something. Everyone sluggishly gets dressed and moves onto breakfast, which is held for an hour before school begins.

But today, I won't be making it to my lessons.

Shuffling into the line, waiting for a tray of eggs and toast, I push my way closer to Kyle. To say we haven't gotten along during my time here

would be a massive understatement. He's another entitled future frat boy, coasting through life on Daddy's money. I know I live off my father's money too, so I'm not all that different from this asshole.

And maybe that's part of what I hate so much about him. But even more, I think it's the fact that he tried to proposition me to suck his dick on my first night here.

I told him if he ever so much as glanced in my direction again, I'd slice him open. And to his credit, he hasn't.

But that's all gonna change, right the hell now.

Grabbing my tray, I scoot in next to him. He glances at me in his peripheral, but when he notices it's me, he immediately looks away. I contain my smile, knowing I have to play a game here. But still, it's pretty damn funny watching this clown avoid me.

Elbowing him, I mumble, "Hey. I was thinking about what you said to me when I first got here, and I've reconsidered."

His eyes spring up to mine and he looks taken aback. "What? Really?"

"Yea." I shrug. "I'm bored. Meet me in the bathroom in ten minutes?"

He stares at me for a solid ten seconds, surprise lining all his basic-ass features. It's hilarious how easily I can hear his thoughts, contemplating what to do. But like with most guys our age, the prospect of head ultimately wins out.

And he nods. "Okay."

I give him my best version of a smile of enthusiasm, which hopefully doesn't make me look constipated, then I rush out of the line. Dropping my tray on a table, I glance around for any sign of faculty who will stop me. The coast is clear.

Strolling into the bathroom, I smash each stall door open to make sure I'm alone in here. Thankfully it's still pretty early, and most of my classmates are eating breakfast. Leaning up against the stall farthest from the door, I wait for my roomie, nervous excitement rippling in my belly. I can't wait to get out of here.

Cy, I'm coming home.

I know it's only been a month, but it feels like much longer since I haven't spoken to my brother at all. It's the longest we've ever gone without speaking, in our entire lives, and it makes me feel stressed and edgy. They told me that phone privileges are reserved for parents only, but my dad probably told them to tell me that. He's a prick that way.

He won’t be pleased about me coming home, but he’ll need to get over it.

I don’t give a tiny fuck about Solana Beach, my parents, or our giant, gaudy house in the richest neighborhood in town. What I care about is seeing my brother again. Being there for him, and making sure he doesn’t blame himself for me being sent away.

Cyrus has a tendency to blame himself for everything. It might be a part of his anxiety, but he really wears the martyr badge in our household, trying to take responsibility for everything that happens. Little does he know that badge was given to me when we were infants. Whether I want it or not, I’ve been hired as the black sheep of the family, here to answer for everything.

It’s fine. I’m used to it by now. When we were younger, it was more of a bummer. Like when my parents would show up to Cyrus’s award ceremonies and science fairs, but would deliberately ignore my attempts to play the guitar for them.

When I was ten, my dad even cancelled my guitar lessons, out of nowhere. When I asked him why he did it, he said, “Oh, you were still doing that? Why? It’s a huge waste of time. No one makes money playing the guitar.”

He said that to a ten-year-old. To this day, every time he sees me with my guitar at home, he tells me I better *get used to playing in subway stations for quarters.*

My mother is no better. She’s too busy brunching with her Botox-stuffed friends to be concerned with anything her kids are doing. But she doesn’t miss an opportunity to use Cyrus as a bragging point to everyone she knows, while secretly coming down on him about choosing a *money-making field*. She wants to make sure she has *one son who takes care of her*. Because to Carla and Dustin Becker, we’ve always been investments, not children.

And Cyrus is the one who’s rewarding its shareholders.

My fists clench at my sides. This is good, working up this anger thinking about my scumbag parents. It’ll give me the push I need to really lay into this asshole and get myself expelled.

The sounds of someone approaching the bathroom set my teeth on edge. My limbs tense as the door pushes open, and sure enough, in saunters Kyle fuckin’ Beckwith. When he sees me, a knowing smirk covers his lips as he strides up with confidence. I have to fight not to roll my eyes at him, and

the fact that he actually thinks I'd put my mouth anywhere near his gross dick.

He nods at the stall next to me and I raise my brows, motioning for him to step inside first, which he does. He's already unbuckling his belt, which is just lovely.

As soon as he spins to face me, though, he's met with my fist to his stupid face, rather than the eager mouth he was expecting.

Kyle's head flings backward, and he has no time to even react before I'm pummeling him again. And again, and again. I've completely blacked out while I throw punches at his face, growling and grunting. Messing him the fuck up.

When I come to, I'm heaving and he's crumpled on the floor by the toilet, bleeding and shaking.

Straightening up, I take a deep breath and wipe strands of black hair from my eyes. I mimic a kiss to my pal on the floor and turn, swaggering out of the bathroom.

I go back to the cafeteria to finish my eggs, and it only takes about eight minutes before a staff member is grabbing me out of my seat and hauling me to the dean's office.

I'm wearing a smile the whole time.

Hang on tight, Cy. I'm coming for you, brother.



I'VE BEEN in the backseat of this Escalade for two hours.

Good. It means I'm close.

Things moved surprisingly quick after they found Kyle all bloodied up in the bathroom. The dean kept me in his office for hours while they called my parents. I think they expected Mom and Dad to at least feign interest, maybe drive up there; beg them to let me stay.

Little did they know, my parents are thoroughly uninterested in anything regarding me. So instead, my father accepted my expulsion with no more than a brief, half-hearted apology, then sent a driver to come pick me up and bring me home.

I haven’t spoken with him yet. I know he’ll be pissed, more than anything, because I’ve clearly bested him at his own petty game. When I get home, I fully expect him to come down on me like he usually does. *Maybe he’ll even try to beat me some more.…*

The thought worries me for a second, until I brush it off and keep my scowl intact. If he wants to kick my ass again, he’s more than welcome. The only thing it accomplishes is making me hate him even more than I already did.

And prove to me how much more I need to protect Cyrus from his crazy ass.

Not that he would ever lay a hand on Cy the golden boy. Abuse of the smart one must always remain verbal. *Emotional scars only for the good twin.*

As the SUV pulls into our gated community, my heart is in my throat. It’s been a whole month since I last saw or spoke to my brother. Any number of things could have happened to him while I was gone…

He could have gotten nerdier. That thought makes me chuckle to myself.

He could have gotten trapped under a stack of books and fractured his brainiac bone.

He could have made some honest to God friends, which wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world. But then that thought leads me to the next one…

He could have started dating *someone.*

My muscles tense, and my fist clenches at my side, all by its damn self. I’m not surprised by this reaction, though it still startles me, even after its slow build, sprouting up like a weed that crawls languidly through my insides.

I’m protective of Cyrus. Some might say *overprotective*, but I don’t care about what those people think. I don’t really care what *anyone* thinks. Cyrus is a gentler soul than me, which means he needs protection I can give him, being that I’m a ripped, torn, and battered shell of a person. I’m damaged, and I think I always have been.

Clearly something happened in the womb. Cyrus got all the good stuff, and I was left to scrounge like a mangy mutt. It’s the only explanation, for all of it. Why my parents despise me and adore him. Why I struggle with what comes to him easily. Why the wires in my brain are crossed, and why such vile stuff lives inside me.

I've never had to worry about him dating anyone before. His crippling social anxiety makes it pretty hard for him to attempt intimacy, hence the stuff that made our father kick my ass. I like helping Cyrus with things, even when I know I shouldn't. Maybe it's because I like taking care of him…

Maybe it's because I like how much he needs me.

Or maybe it's also because I love seeing that look on his face… The one he's been having more and more recently. The one that I can almost hear, beckoning me closer. Even if Cyrus felt too awkward to push me away and stop this game we've started playing, his body would speak for him. And it definitely does…

Everything betrays him, from the twinkle in his green eyes, to the flutter of his dark lashes, his labored breathing, and the way he bites down on his pink lips.

Shifting in my seat, I shake my head, gazing out the window while we pull onto our long driveway, cruising up to the mansion that is our SoCal home.

Why am I getting so carried away? *Why can't I stop myself from thinking things that will only serve to fuck me, and my brother, over??*

It's one thing to want to help him… To offer him up my services to make him feel more comfortable. But the rage that fills my limbs when I think of Cyrus overcoming his timidity, admitting to people other than me that he likes boys—he hasn't officially said it out loud yet, but I'm just waiting for him to do it on his own time—and actually start dating someone, it's fucking idiotic.

My brother is comfortably snuggled up in the closet, but I shouldn't *want* that for him. I shouldn't want to keep him in denial just so that I can be the only person who gets to visit him there.

My troublesome thoughts are cut off when the SUV stops in front of our house and the driver hops out. He quickly opens my door, and I slide out, waltzing straight to the front door, knowing he'll grab my bags for me. I walk inside the house, praying like the sinner I am that I see Cyrus first, not Mom or Dad. And sure enough, my brother is in the first room I go to; the kitchen.

When he sees me, his face lights right up. It's hard not to smile seeing how excited he is, but I make sure to thwart it a bit, as usual. After all, gotta keep us distinctly different.

Cy smiles a lot, and I don't. *He's the Yin to my Yang; the Ernie to my Bert, the Patch Kids to my Sour.*

"Hey, G," I mumble, unable to keep my lips from curving as he launches himself at me.

"I missed you, B," he sighs into the crook of my neck, squeezing onto me hard. "I'm so glad you're back."

"Me too." My hand cups the back of his head while I hug him, giving into how comforting it is to be back with him. Reunited with my other piece. "Are you doing okay? Everything good?"

He chuckles. "You were at some secluded boarding school and you're asking *me* if I'm okay?"

"Well… yea. You're you, Cy, and I'm me."

He scoffs, but then concedes, pulling back to look at me. "Point well made." His eyes dart around quickly, and I stiffen.

"Dad here?" I ask, not really wanting to bring him up, but knowing I'll need to face the music sooner or later. Might as well get it over with.

Cyrus nods solemnly. "He's in his office. They didn't tell me anything, as usual. But I overheard them talking about some fight you got into?"

He detaches from our hug, and I let go of him slowly, hesitantly. "I had to get out of there somehow."

His lips curl. "Leave it to you to kick the crap out of some innocent person to serve your own purpose."

I narrow my gaze at him. "First of all, that asshole was far from innocent. And second of all, what would you even know about my purpose, good twin?"

His eyes fall to his shoes, and he bites his lip. Typical Cyrus move. He does it when he's unsure of what to say, which is pretty much all the time. I don't want him to feel bad… I just got back here.

So I squeeze his shoulder, and his gem-like irises slide back up to mine.

"I'm really happy to see you, Cy."

He releases an unbridled smile on me. One that has me ignoring all the warmth in my gut. "Me too."

"Cyrus!" A shrill voice comes from down the hall and we both freeze. "Is that your brother I hear??"

I roll my eyes. "For someone on that many benzos, she has the hearing of a damn ferret."

“Actually, ferrets have an acute sense of hearing,” my brother rambles, fidgeting in place. “Same goes for mole rats, mice… other critters like that. You want animals with good hearing, you gotta go bats, obviously. Elephants, dogs, horses—”

“Oh my God, please send me back to boarding school,” I groan, and he grins.

As much as I’m teasing him, on the inside I’m giddy. I missed this. Everyone up at Lake Tahoe was boring, and stupid. I definitely didn’t get any of my brother’s super knowledge.

The clomping of our mother’s high heels grows closer and I nudge Cyrus. “I’ll catch up with you later. I want to hear all about what’s been happening with you since I’ve been gone.”

I’m not necessarily trying to be possessive in the look I’m giving him, but I think it comes off that way, regardless. But I don’t think he’s mad at it… His cheeks flush and he bites his lip, reminding me of that night a month ago…

When *I* did it.

Strange sensations fizzle around inside me, but I’m forced to ignore them as Mom rounds the corner to the kitchen, immediately pinning me with an obnoxious look I definitely didn’t miss.

“Oh, Colson. How nice of you to stroll in against any of our wishes, after having wasted thousands of dollars of your father’s money.” She folds her arms over her chest, popping her hip out in typical Carla Becker fashion.

“Um, actually, *I* want him here,” Cyrus interjects, but Mom holds her hand up to him.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” She lifts her brows.

I pause for a moment, pretending to think before answering, “Dad’s stupid for spending that much money on something he knew I was going to get thrown out of?”

“Ugh.” Mom rolls her eyes and stomps away. “You’re impossible, Colson, I swear to God… Come on. Your father needs to speak with you.”

“Ooh. *Fun*,” I mutter, following her out of the room, not missing an opportunity to mimic hanging myself to Cyrus on my way out.

We walk the hall toward Dad’s office, and when we get there, I stroll inside first, going straight to his desk. He’s on his cell phone, pacing across

the room, so I take a seat in his desk chair, until my mom snaps her fingers at me frantically, motioning for me to get up.

"Yea, well, last time I checked you work for me, Poindexter," my father says to someone on the phone in his usual self-assured rich asshole tone. I barely even notice it anymore, but now that I've been away for a few weeks, it's really just grating in my ear like nails on a chalkboard. "I don't care what you have to do, just make it work. Or you'll be outside Whole Foods with a cardboard sign that says *Will perform sexual favors for sesame chicken.*"

Dad looks up and sees me, his expression going from ruthless businessman to unenthused, regretful father in seconds flat.

"Hey, look, I gotta go. My kid's here and apparently I need to remind *him* of who's boss, too."

He hangs up on whoever he was talking to and stalks over to his desk, taking a seat in his chair, while I nestle into my seat across from him. Mom slinks over to the office door, but he barks at her, "Stay where you are, woman."

He folds his hands on the desk. So I do the same, mirroring his posture. I know he hates when I do that.

Sure enough, he squints at me. "Colson… Do you have any idea how much your little stunt put me out?"

I lean back in my chair. "Not really, but I'm assuming at least a quarter of the Solana Prep tuition."

"Yea." He nods. "But it's more than that. You're an *embarrassment*. You can't even behave for long enough to accept a goddamn punishment."

My jaw tightens. "That's the point of rebellion, father dearest."

He smacks his hand down on the desk, and I jump. "I'm not fucking around here, Colson. I'm sick and tired of this bullshit. But obviously sending you away won't take. So it seems like the only option I have is to let you stay here."

My gaze narrows, my blood pressure spiking. "*Let* me?"

"Under one condition." He ignores my outrage. "You're going to see a doctor. Your mother picked him out. I think he can help you through some of these… predilections you seem to possess for no goddamn reason."

I'm sick to my fucking stomach as I peek at my mother. She refuses to look at me. Just keeps picking at her acrylic nails.

"And I want you to leave your brother alone," Dad goes on.

Biting the inside of my cheek, I stare him down while he gives it right back to me. As much as he likes to act like he has no idea where I get any of my *behavioral issues*, Dustin Becker is the poster boy for stubborn and infallible, two qualities I most certainly got from him.

"Technically, that's two conditions," I mumble, keeping my eyes locked on his, even though I can see his rage rising, and about twenty percent of me thinks he might lunge over this desk and strangle me to death.

"I'm fucking serious, Colson." His voice is low in its austerity. "I don't have a choice but to keep you in this household. But I will *not* tolerate you corrupting your brother with your toxic bullshit. Hopefully Dr. Roberts can sort you. Your mother says he's the best in his field."

"Really?" I scoff, rolling my eyes. "He's the best at what, exactly? Beating the *gay* out of kids?"

My father's jaw clenches visibly while his eyes shoot daggers at me. "Oh, trust me… If that were possible, I would've done it myself."

My fist balls and releases over and over at my side. I'm fucking heated right now, rage rising inside me by the second. Not for me, but for Cyrus. Because despite what happened, I know I'm not gay. That was just something I did to help him…

Because *he* is. And my brother doesn't deserve this kind of unsupportive prejudice in his own home.

Glancing at my mother, I find her texting. Not a single fuck to be given for her kids. Letting out a breath, I suddenly just feel so damn tired. It happens in a split second. I can barely keep my head up anymore.

I just want to lie down.

"Okay. Whatever," I tell my father, standing up from the chair. "Can I go now?"

I feel him staring at me, but I don't want to look at him. I'm too weak, and I think he likes that.

"Go straight to your room," he finally mutters. "I don't want to see your face until tomorrow morning. Now I have to bring you to Solana Prep and see if they'll take you back."

My limbs are filled with cement as I sluggishly wander to the door, leaving his office feeling a million pounds heavier than when I went in.

I don't even bother checking for Cyrus in the kitchen. I just go straight up to my room. It's exactly like I left it, which is good.

I barely even have the energy to throw shit around in my state of rage, though I still do.

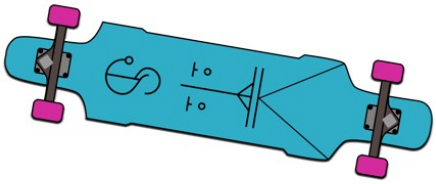
And when I'm gasping for air, I lie down on my bed and face the wall.

At least I'm home, I tell myself on repeat, though I'm not even sure I mean it.

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3

CYRUS



"Now pop your heel. Like this."

Colson repeats the trick he's done five times already—in a row, I might add—pausing at the end with raised eyebrows as if to say, *See? Easy.*

Yea, no. It's not as easy as he's making it seem.

But I try, regardless, and the board does flip. But it hits me in the ankle, and I grumble out loud, grasping at it and jumping around on one foot while I seethe through the pain. And my twin brother laughs at me. *Typical*.

"Too slow." He chuckles, wiping his eyes from his laughter while I wipe the pain-tears from mine.

"I'm doing exactly what you're doing," I mutter, pulling up the cuff of my pants to check my ankle. There's an immediate bruise forming.

"If you were doing exactly what I was doing, you would've landed it." He grins, and it's mesmerizing.

How can he look exactly like me when he smiles, yet somehow his radiates so much more confidence than mine ever could?

My stomach knots at the thought, and I force myself to look away.

Sighing out loud, I hop back onto my board and cruise around the giant loop of our driveway while Colson continues to heel flip, and kick flip, and be the precious Tony Hawk replicate while I just roll my eyes after him. But I can't help smiling, because at least we're hanging out and having fun. He's *back*, and the world feels right again. Life has been flipped right-side up.

Sometimes I think I can only have this kind of fun with my brother.

My lack of friends is sort of depressing, and it was a million times worse with Colson gone for a month. During those twenty-eight days he was away at boarding school, I was lonelier than ever before. It put a lot of things into perspective for me.

Unfortunately, that sort of clarity doesn't help me at all. Because the things I realize now, about my attachment to my twin brother, are things that will do nothing but condemn me from normal society as a total freakshow.

I don't want to care about what people think, but when those people are your own parents, it makes it difficult to ignore. Especially when they're deliberately trying to keep you away from the one person on the earth who truly gets you.

Colson's been back with me at Solana Beach Preparatory School for a few weeks now. And *there*, it's like he never left. Not that a month is a long time, but my brother was welcomed back into his social circle with open arms.

It's hard not to feel a little hurt by it. At home, Colson and I are inseparable. Or at least we were before the kissing incident. But at school, we don't interact much. Col doesn't care about his education, and I do. I don't find his dumb friends at all amusing, and he does. That puts us in completely different social circles. His, a wide circumference, and mine… a fucking dot, basically.

Don't get me wrong, my brother definitely ensures that I'm not bullied. His reputation proceeds him, and anyone who even looks at me funny runs the risk of being thrown off the bleachers. But still, that doesn't stop me from feeling exactly like the social pariah I am. At a time when everyone else is pairing off into various cliques, I'm on the sidelines, as usual. Permanently benched from any form of popularity.

There's still time to come out of my shell, but it's complicated to even think about. I don't fit in with any of the kids I'd once called my *friends*, which only happened in the first place as a means to avoid my father coming down on me for being weird or awkward. The other day, I overheard him telling Mom how much he wishes I would *just act normal sometimes.* When even your parents think you're a hopeless nerd, it's difficult to muster up the confidence to be *anyone*, let alone yourself.

It’s not like that with Colson. We couldn’t be more different, but we still love hanging out. Our differences somehow make us closer, and I think that’s how it should be.

Sometimes I think he’s all I need…

I know it’s a problem. *And it’s certainly a problem how much closer I want to be to him.*

It’s been two months and we haven’t so much as mentioned one word about the kiss. A kiss that was so much more than just a kiss… At least to me.

It was a life-changing experience. I wish it wasn’t living rent-free in my brain, but it is, and I can’t evict it. The more worrying quagmire, though, is that I’m not sure I want to.

I had my first kiss with my twin brother… And every time I think about it, my toes curl and goosebumps sheet my flesh.

Glancing after Colson now, I watch him kicking and flipping in his ripped black jeans and sleeveless neon pink tank hanging open, enough that when he twists, I can see his sides. A couple of his scattered tattoos catch my attention, and I bite my lip.

Colson’s friend Jax has a cousin who works at a tattoo parlor in Santa Monica. So even though he’s underage, he has some ink on his torso and his arms. For our fifteenth birthday, he asked if I wanted to get a matching one with him, but I chickened out. Tattoos aren’t really my scene… I’m more of the dressing up for Comic Con type.

But they definitely look good on my brother…

I’m startled out of my perverse thoughts at the sound of Dad’s Mercedes roaring into the driveway. Terror fills my limbs as I freeze, dropping my board and shooting a nervous look at Colson. He doesn’t look anywhere near as worried as he should, which is stressing me out even more.

We’re not supposed to be hanging out. Dad said part of the agreement of Colson coming home from boarding school was him keeping his distance from me. He didn’t specify why out loud, since I think the awkwardness of mentioning that he caught his two sons kissing would be enough to turn him to stone. But he and Mom have been keeping a strict eye on us, when they’re around, which fortunately for me, is not all that often.

Regardless of the family drama—*like incestuous make-out sessions and child abuse*—Dad’s been sort of *off* lately. I mean, he’s never exactly been close with us. In all honesty, most of the parental memories I have of early

childhood are with our nannies, Petra and Millie. Still, in the last few months, more than ever, Dad's rarely around. And when he is, he has little to no interest in being near us. He's constantly arguing with people on his phone, spending the entire day in his office, only emerging to clomp through the hall in his Italian loafers to the front door, where he leaves and drives away.

And Mom is no better. She's always seen us as a conversation piece more than her offspring. The only time she speaks to us is when she's scolding us about something, Colson more than me, of course. But you best believe she doesn't miss an opportunity to remind me how important it is for me to choose a career that will make me lots of money.

Cy baby, you need to be rich and successful so you can take care of me when I inevitably leave your father. That's her favorite bedtime story to tell me, with a glass of white wine in her hand as she pops a Xanax.

I wish I could say it's upsetting, but we're definitely used to it. It's amazing the kinds of things you can adapt to. *Normal* really is subjective.

Grabbing my board, I rush toward the house, but Colson stops me.

"Just stay," he grumbles. "What's he gonna do?"

My eyes fling to our father as he opens his car door, barking at someone on the phone.

"I don't exactly want to find out," I whisper nervously, giving Colson a side-look before my eyes drop to the scar on his collarbone.

His jaw tenses visibly. But he says nothing. He simply aims a wrathful glare at our father.

Colson's bruises from *that night* healed with a quiet anger beneath the surface of his skin like scar tissue. Let's be real, the neglect has always been worse for Colson, and the night Dad caught us spurred an inevitable resentment like kerosene on the flames of his fury.

For our parents, yes, but I think also for me…

I truly hope he doesn't blame me for him being the family punching bag. It's not my fault, and I love him. *More than I should*. Still, we haven't talked about it, so I'm not really sure what he thinks. I'm not sure what he's doing or why it even started…

Maybe I manifested it with my own sick desires I've been cultivating for a while now.

"I told you to fix it or it's your ass!" Dad barks into his iPhone, and I jump. He slams his car door and stomps toward the front of the house. But

he stops when he finally notices Colson and me standing here. He narrows his gaze at Colson, then turns to me. “Don’t you have homework?”

My brow furrows and my lips part. I don’t even know how to respond to that question.

Of course I have homework, but most of it’s already done. I thought he’d at least be happy that I’m outside doing *normal boy things*.

My eyes flit to my brother, whose fists are balled as he continues to glower at our father.

Dad pins Colson with the same stare, and it’s times like these that you can truly see the resemblance between us. Dark hair, sharp jaw. Dad’s eyes are more blue-green, but still. We got his European appearance, that’s for sure. And even though we’re identical, Colson manages to resemble him more, what with the endless grumpy look.

“I thought we had an agreement,” Dad growls at Colson.

I’m scared shitless for my brother. The memories of Dad beating him haunt my brain sometimes when I close my eyes. I *never* want to experience that again, even if it means denying my heart to appease him.

But not my brother. Colson doesn’t flinch. He simply folds his arms over his chest. “Yea. And I’m seeing your stupid doctor.”

“You know what I mean,” Dad murmurs in a low, irritable tone.

“I really don’t.” Colson shrugs, hopping back onto his board.

“I’m fucking serious, Colson.” Our father sighs, as if he’s conceding. Really, he just looks and sounds too exhausted to argue. Now that I’m really looking at him, he has dark circles under his eyes, his tie is loosened, collar unbuttoned, and hair tousled all over the place. “Don’t distract your brother. He needs to stay focused on school. At least one of you needs to end up successful or I’ll kill myself. And we all know it won’t be you.”

With that dollop of fatherly wisdom, he saunters inside the house, leaving us standing next to our skateboards—that *he* bought us—faces frozen in hopelessness. Well, mine is. Colson doesn’t look surprised, but as usual, he looks unhappy.

A solid minute of silence goes by before Colson shakes his head. “Forget him. He probably just didn’t get a chance to plow his secretary today.”

My chest grows tight and a sickening chill brushes my flesh. I blink at my brother. “You think… he’s cheating on Mom?”

The look Colson is giving me makes my knees want to give out for some reason. I guess I'd never really thought about it… But now that I am, it makes a lot of sense.

Colson's eyes soften in sympathy as he steps over to me and places a warm hand on my shoulder. "Cy… grow up. *Of course* he's cheating on Mom."

My lashes flutter in rapid blinking as my eyes fall to my sneakers. This is all very troubling. I'm not really in the mood to skate anymore…

"I'm just gonna go inside and… finish my homework." I pick up my board and wander toward the house in a melancholy daze.

I've always known our home life wasn't perfect, despite how much Mom tries to make it look that way to other people. On the surface, our family is perfect. Our parents take care of us, we all get along, and most importantly, we're rich.

But beneath the shiny plastic coating sits a rotting corpse of misery, distrust, shame… All that fun stuff.

Stop being a baby. What's a divorce added to the list of imperfect things that make up your life?

"You're really gonna let him get to you like that?" Colson calls, but I ignore him.

Unfortunately, there are no chemical equations to erase bad parents. *I guess it's up to me to come up with one.*



THE CITY IS BRIGHT, even at night.

Lights on the billboards twinkle like clusters of stars you're standing right beneath. My eyes reflect the images as I gaze up at them in awe.

I'm in Times Square. *How? Why?*

Something inside tells me there's a reason, but I can't remember it. I'm distracted… swept up in the lights and the noise. Even late at night, it's all so vibrant. Like the time three years ago when we came to New York City as a family. Everything was so loud and dirty.

It was amazing.

But right now, I'm supposed to be focusing on something. I'm supposed to be looking out for—

Gasp!

Look! It's him!

The surrounding voices snap me into focus and my face swings, checking for what they're seeing.

And then I catch it… A glimpse of him.

He's in all black, cape billowing in the breeze as he jumps from building to building, following the giant glowing signal in the sky. *How did I miss it?*

My feet make me move, and I walk to follow him, though he's so far away. I'll never catch up.

But even just being able to look at him now is enough.

The Dark Knight. The perfect blend of good and evil.

Suddenly, I'm in an alleyway, and I'm nervous because I think I'm lost. I'm lost and *alone*.

A sense of fear crawls up my spine.

Until a large form falls from the sky, landing with a loud thump right in front of me.

He's here.

Breath hitches in my throat as I gaze up at him, bright eyes shining, the rest of his face covered by a black mask. His massive body crowds me, and I fumble backward into the wall, fingers trembling, sweat breaking out at the nape of my neck. He's so *close*…

He leans in even closer, and the scent of him overtakes me. He whispers something… But I can't understand it…

And then it's all sucked away as my eyes open, and I awake with a start.

Blinking myself back to reality, I look around in the dark. I'm in my bedroom… Not in Times Square.

A dream. I was dreaming… About Batman.

Shaking my head, I rub my eyes hard as I sit up. The book I was reading when I passed out slides off my chest and falls onto the floor with a thud.

I clear my throat. That was a weird dream. I'm still a bit confused, dazed after whatever that was…

I mean, it's no secret that I'm a Batman fan. We've already established that I'm a nerd, and he's by far my favorite superhero. His movies are superior, his comics and backstory are flawless. He's just the best.

But in this dream, like in the others I've had, I'm noticing more than just how cool he is as a fictional character. I'm noticing him in a different sort of way… A way that brings my attention to the ache between my legs.

I'm hard as a fucking rock…

From dreaming about fucking Batman. Again.

Cool.

I rub my eyes with my fingers. It's bad enough I'm struggling with my sexuality. I have been since I went through puberty, which also happened later than my brother. Our physical development has definitely been in synch, but the beginning of a sexual… *appetite*, if you will, has definitely been slower for me than for my brother.

He's been talking about girls, hooking up with them since he was like twelve, whereas I only just started thinking things like that maybe a year ago. It's just never been a concern for me.

I worry about things like global warming, chemistry finals, and if the new Star Wars movies will hold up. Not getting into the pants of everyone I know.

Which is why Colson had volunteered his time, to help me… figure stuff out.

A quiet knock startles me, and I quickly grab my comforter, pulling it over my waist just as the door opens a crack. My heart is jumping while Colson slinks into my bedroom and closes the door behind him.

"Are you okay?" he asks in a whisper, waltzing over to my bed. "I heard a crash."

I nod frantically. "Yea. Yup. I'm fine, I just um… dropped a book."

He glances at the floor, then back at me, quirking a brow. "You're still doing homework?"

"I fell asleep," I tell him, inching away when he takes a seat on the bed by my feet. "Why are you up?"

"Couldn't sleep," he mumbles, his eyes lingering on my comforter. Then he takes in a breath, letting it out slowly as he reclines onto his elbows. His eyes slide up to mine, and I swallow hard. "Wanna see something?"

I'm feeling awfully keyed up at the moment, and for some reason, my erection hasn't fully disappeared yet, so I'm nervous. I don't want to be sitting around in bed with my brother while my dick is hard… It's not right. I really need to start drawing more lines and stop erasing them.

But even so, there seems to be no part of me that isn't interested in what he wants to show me. So I nod.

Colson pulls his phone out of his pocket and fiddles with it for a moment while I fiddle with the comforter covering my inconvenient boner that just won't *go away*, proving once more that my body hates me. When he finds what he's looking for, he lifts the phone in my direction.

On the screen is a video… Of a lady and a guy getting naked.

It's porn. *Great.*

Trying to swallow again, I scoot back and scoff. "Why are you showing me that?"

Colson spins the phone and checks the screen himself. "Do you think it's hot?" His eyes lift to mine once more, the green shimmering in the low light of my reading lamp.

He knows I don't. Why is he fucking with me?? Does he want me to just say it out loud?

That thought is stressful.

The thing is, I'm ninety-nine percent sure the video on my brother's phone doesn't interest me whatsoever. Unless of course, I was going to ignore the lady and focus on the guy…

But even that makes me beyond nervous. I'm not confident like my brother is. The truth of the matter is that I'm scared. I'm *afraid* of my own goddamn sexuality. *Kill me now.*

I should just lie. I know I should say something normal… Pretend I'm into it the way he is, to avoid any prying questions. Even if he knows I'm lying, which I'm positive he will.

So I nod slowly. The most unconvincing movement ever. "Yea… It's pretty hot, I guess."

Colson eyes me for a moment, then looks back at the screen. Then back at me.

My cheeks heat under his green gaze and I fidget in place, waiting for him to call me out. For him to tell me I'm a liar. *A big gay liar.*

But instead, he slithers himself up on my bed, closer to where I'm propped against my headboard. I try moving away, to put space between us, but there's nowhere else to go. I'm already almost trapped between him and the wall. He smooshes his arm up to mine, settling in by my side, then reaches into his pants with his right hand, while the other holds the phone up in front of us.

My stomach flips like the whole world just tipped upside down. “W-what are you doing?”

“It feels good,” he whispers. My eyes are stuck on the sight of his hand moving inside his pants. “Remember… what I showed you?”

My whole body is quivering as I sit, stock still next to my twin brother while he touches himself. *Oh, I remember.*

How could I forget?

A few nights before the kiss that broke his bones, we were up, right here, in my room, talking. Colson started mentioning this girl Annabelle he wanted to make out with. He was doing it to mess with me, because he knows how uncomfortable I get talking about hooking up with girls. And the more twitchy I get, the more details he goes into.

He wouldn’t stop going, until he was pulling his dick out of his pants and… showing me how he wanted her to touch him.

He got himself off while I watched. And all I could think about was doing it myself.

Doing it to *myself, I mean. With him. Not doing it for him.…*

My mouth is overflowing with saliva, and I have to keep swallowing over and over. My silence speaks volumes, and Colson rolls his face to look at me.

“You should do it, too.” His voice is a breath that slinks in through my ear and burrows its way into my brain.

He’s my brother. My favorite person. The *only* person who really matters to me in the world. The only person who truly gets me… who truly loves me.

He wouldn’t tell me to do something if it weren’t right… Right?

He’s just trying to help me, like he did when he kissed me. It doesn’t have to mean anything. He’s just showing me how to be more… confident.

And while I don’t think he’s struggling against the same sorts of sick, twisted thoughts that I’m warring with right now, I also know I can’t keep myself from doing *exactly* what he tells me to.

He has a commanding hold on me… He always has.

Slowly and hesitantly, I pull the comforter away from my waist, the outline of my erection immediately visible in my pajama pants. I peek at Colson, his gaze moving from my hard-on up to my eyes. My face sets ablaze with shame and humiliation.

But Colson doesn’t comment or tease. Instead, he pulls his pajamas down enough that his own erection springs out, then his fist curls around it, and he goes back to stroking.

A hard pump happens between my legs at the sight, tightness strangling the life out of my chest. *This… I don’t think is right.*

I’m not supposed to be looking at my brother’s dick. And I’m *definitely* not supposed to like the way it looks.

Gay or not… *This is wrong.*

Fear clutches at my ribcage. “We sh-shouldn’t do this…”

“It’s no big deal, Cy,” Colson sighs, his eyes set on the porn video on his phone while he jerks himself slowly. Then he peers at me once more. “Guys always do this.”

Really? I want to ask, but I don’t want to sound like a total loser.

I know everyone jerks off… I certainly do, like when I wake up from dreams about muscular men with raspy voices in black Kevlar suits. But honestly, I wasn’t aware that guy friends jerk off next to each other. I wouldn’t know, obviously, because I have no friends.

But I have Colson. And he’s pulling on his dick right next to me. It’d be rude not to join in…

It’s not like we’re touching each other…

I’m really trying to dampen how badly I secretly want to do this. Pulling my pajamas down just a bit, like Colson, my dick flings out onto my abs. And I don’t miss how his eyes flick to it the second it’s out.

“I guess we’re identical downstairs too,” he hums a chuckle.

I wish I could laugh along with him, but I’m completely swept up in the raspy sound of his voice. I’ve never heard him sound like this before…

I like it. I’m sure I’m not supposed to, but…

I can’t help it.

My tentative hand brushes down to my dick and as soon as I touch it, sensation sweeps me up like a tidal wave. Chomping down on my lower lip, I curl my fingers around the shaft and pump, slowly, eyes darting over to Colson to see how he’s doing it. Fast or slow, hard or soft. I want to do it just like he is.

Mimicking his movements, I tug on myself leisurely, my lashes fluttering at how damn incredible it feels already. When I glance at Colson’s face, it looks like he’s watching the video. But I’m not.

I don’t care about the video at all. I’m too busy watching his hand move. I don’t know if I can actually see his dick growing the more he jerks it, but I feel like I can. It’s a wondrous thing to witness.

My hooded gaze slides up to my brother’s face, and I find him looking at me. My breaths shallow as our eyes lock. I’m burning so hot I could combust.

Colson leans into me farther, and it isn’t until his cheek drops onto my shoulder that I notice how close we truly are. We’re pressed together, absorbing one another’s heat while our hands move faster and faster. Colson releases his dick long enough to shove his pants down more. Then he slips his leg over mine and lifts up his t-shirt, exposing the slopes of his slender muscles.

“Lift your shirt,” he breathes a rumbling command, then tilts his head to connect our eyes. “Unless you want to get cum on it.”

A small whimper flees my lips. Just hearing him say the word *cum*… It brings a serious throb to my balls.

“A-are you going to…” I croak out the words, then pause, my face heating in humiliation.

“What?” he asks, gazing up at me. “Come?” I nod quickly. “Probably soon.” His eyelids droop and he lets out a soft groan.

My lips quiver while I watch him. I *cannot* fucking help it. I know I should be watching the video, or closing my eyes and imagining *anyone* else, not my fucking brother. But the way he looks right now is… I think it’s *exactly* what I like.

And I don’t know what the fuck that means.

My hand keeps working on my erection, the buzzing inside me building and building, rapidly climbing to the top of the precipice. I curl myself closer into my brother’s warm body, eyes stuck on his hand, just like mine, rubbing the inches of his dick… also just like mine.

“Are you going to come, Cyrus?” he asks me, and when I turn my face, his is right there… Right in front of mine.

His eyes fall to my mouth. My heart thuds so hard I almost tremor.

Memories of him sucking and biting my mouth flood my mind. Of him climbing on top of me, my hips grinding up into his…

God, I want him to kiss me again.

It’s so fucked up. So bad, but I want it like my lungs want oxygen. Not a *want* at all… A pure human fucking *need*.

The panic that usually accompanies the memories of us kissing is here, the fear that Dad could walk in at any moment and catch us again tightening my muscles in preparation for calamity.

But the strangest thing is that… I think it's turning me on even more.

"It… feels like I might… s-soon." I shiver as I answer his question.

"Good," he whispers, breathing warmth over my mouth. "Tell me when."

I nod frantically, jerking myself harder, rougher while he does the same, the sounds of us panting together invading my ears. Colson tosses the phone onto the bed and reaches over to lift up my t-shirt for me.

His fingers brush my stomach when he does, and I coil up.

I gasp. Everything gets tight.

And then I tumble over the edge.

A broken groan leaves my lips, forming the words, "I'm… Col, I'm…"

That's all I can get out as an explosion happens inside my body, a world of tingling pleasure taking me over. Aching spurts pulse from the end of my dick, shooting onto my abs, while my mind sings…

Kiss me. Kiss me kiss me kiss me… Please, Colson.

Colson growls, smooshing himself into me, swallowing up my gasps and whimpers. His hips grind up into his hand and I watch while cycloning through my orgasm…

His lips ghosting over mine just enough to drive me absolutely insane.

"I'm gonna come, Cy…" he moans quietly, burrowing his face into the crook of my neck.

His breath on my sensitive skin brings on flutters to my stomach, keeping the good sensations going for much longer. And my eyes stay stuck on Colson's dick as it erupts, just like mine did.

He comes, pouring his orgasm on his own abs. I suck my lower lip, biting down on it while I watch him coming… *Loving* the sight.

I really love watching it. I want to make it happen.

I want to be the thing that makes him shiver the way he is right now.

And I quickly realize that I shouldn't. I shouldn't like watching my brother have an orgasm. I should *not* want to give him one myself.

Fuck… What did we just do?

Our heavy breaths ring through the room while my high wears off, and I begin to freak out.

That was wrong… We weren't supposed to do that.

And maybe it wouldn’t have been so bad, if I didn’t like it as much as I clearly did.

Why do we keep doing such bad stuff together…? And why does it feel so motherfucking good?

God, I think I need my inhaler.

Maybe brothers jerk off together sometimes, but I’m sure they don’t touch when they do. They probably don’t moan together and writhe together, and one of them probably doesn’t think about how good it might feel to do it *to* each other instead…

While I’m overthinking everything, as usual, Colson is calmer than I’ve ever seen him before. He lets out a sated purr and reaches over, swiping his fingers through the shiny stuff on my abs.

And as much as I want to keep feigning regret, I’m falling *deep* into the same sleepy daze that currently holds my twin brother, except that I’m captivated… Hypnotized, enamored, and fully occupied by him.

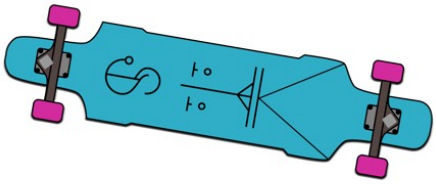
He lifts his face to look at me. I give up the last fuck I was holding onto as our identical green eyes meld together.

And he whispers, “Mine.”

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4

CYRUS



I ’m reading in the library when the doorbell rings.

I hear it, of course, but make no move to answer it, since we have a staff of eight, and I’m sure at least one of them is on it.

Plus, I’m really into this book I’m reading on the life of Nikola Tesla. Our nanny, Petra, gave it to me for my sixteenth birthday a couple of months ago, and I’m just now getting around to reading it. She got Colson a book, too… *The Mothman Prophecies*. More his style.

But I’m really intrigued by Tesla. He was an honest to God scientist who never got the credit he deserved. Unlike that good for nothing elephant abuser Edison. *But I digress.*

It has me thinking about the path I’m choosing for my future. I know I want to work in a lab, creating things, like medicine. Truthfully, there are a lot of things I know I could do. My mind is my most precious asset, a blessing and sometimes a curse. But apparently, a lot of people are interested in what I’ll choose to do with my future. And the idea of working in a lab, away from everyone else… That really excites me.

The doorbell rings again and I put my book down with a huff, sliding off the big, expensive leather chair.

Ooh! Maybe it’s my life-sized Batman action figure!

Stalking toward the front door, the doorbell keeps ringing over and over. My brow furrows.

Then someone starts banging.

My pace slows, and I swallow hard. Everything around is suddenly so very quiet, the only sounds are that of the doorbell and the incessant pounding, and I'm not sure what would make me think this, but I have the distinct feeling that my life is about to change drastically. *Forever.*

My pulse speeds up to an unhealthy rate as I break out in instant chills and my vision swims.

I'm suddenly so dizzy I might fall down.

Struggling to catch my breath, I close my eyes and try to count.

One, two…

It's okay. Everything will be fine.

Three, four…

You've got this. Just breathe.

Five, six.

Fishing my inhaler out of my pocket, I bring it to my lips and use it quickly, holding in the medicine that will help me.

The banging is so loud it's ringing in my ears.

"Open up!" someone shouts from outside the door.

"W-who's there?" I ask, hating how weak and childish my voice sounds.

"Open up or we'll be forced to enter," the brusque male voice thunders. "This is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We're here for Dustin Becker."

Okay… Now not only am I having a severe anxiety attack, but I think I'm having an actual heart attack, too. I might be dying because my life is flashing before my eyes.

"Will someone please get the goddamn door?!" Mom shouts from somewhere upstairs.

"Mom…" I call out, as loudly as I can, staring at the door just waiting for someone to kick it in.

"You have five seconds to open this door or we're breaking it down," the voice informs. "We have a warrant."

"Mom!" I croak a little louder this time.

Glancing around slowly, I notice that for the first time in years, there's no staff in the house. Now that I think of it, I haven't seen Petra all day. The chefs and gardeners, the cleaning staff… No one is here.

The house is empty and silent.

Minus the loud banging.

"What the fuck is going on in here?" Colson stomps up behind me.

I give him a peculiar look. I didn't even know he was here.

His eyes are sort of glassy, and he looks tired.

“They’re here for Dad,” I whisper to him with my nervous glare back on the door.

“Great,” he mutters sarcastically. Then his sluggish gaze lifts to the ceiling, taking in our surroundings. “Say goodbye to your home, baby G.”

I’m momentarily distracted from the terrifying men about to break our door down by how strange my brother seems right now. He’s certainly been a bit off in the last few months, but it’s hard to put my finger on it. In general, he’s pretty strange.

The guy behind the door is literally counting down from five, and I’m about to piss myself.

This is too much. It’s all too much.

I cover my eyes and squeeze them shut while Colson hums a song I don’t recognize.

“What the hell is all the banging?? Jesus Christ!” Mom comes clunking down the stairs, just as scary-voice-guy is getting to one.

She whips open the door to reveal at least six visible federal agents.

Time freezes, and for a split second that feels like an hour, everything is completely still. The world has stopped moving, like in the movies when time stops. All I can hear are the breaths fleeing my lips.

Until my mother’s voice clicks it all back on. “Can I help you?”

The tall guy with gray hair and the letters FBI on his windbreaker holds up a piece of paper and asks, “Are you Mrs. Becker?”

For the first time in my entire life, I see uncertainty on my mother’s face. “Um… Whittle-Becker. What is this about?”

“Is your husband home?” He ignores her question and asks his own.

Dad is home. I know he is, since his Benz is in the driveway. Though I haven’t seen him all day…

Lately, he stays locked away in his office. Sometimes I can hear him through the door shouting at people. Or himself.

“I… I’m not…” Mom stutters. “Please tell me what this is about!”

Rather than answering her, he shoves the piece of paper at her, and then all the officers push right past her, storming inside the house like a goddamn battalion.

I stumble out of their way, sealing myself to the wall next to my brother, who doesn’t exactly look scared. More intrigued than anything.

“Hey! Wait!” Mom shouts and chases after them. “You can’t just come in here!”

A female officer steps up to my mother and takes her by the arm. Mom gives her a look of disgust, ripping out of the woman’s grasp.

“Ma’am, your husband is wanted by the US government for insider trading, as well as by the IRS criminal division for felony tax evasion. They have him for two-point-four million dollars in undocumented revenue.”

I think I just blacked out.

My mother’s facial expression mirrors the shock and dread I’m feeling inside. I jump at the sounds of my father’s office door being bashed in a matter of feet from where I’m trembling.

This isn’t happening… It’s not real.

Colson grabs onto my arm to steady me, then slinks his around my waist. Just feeling him next to me is the comfort I need right now, while everything else is spinning out.

“Just breathe, Cy,” he whispers in my ear, and my head drops into his. I lean into him, my eyes closing while I try to simply focus on breathing.

There are shouts echoing from Dad’s office. I hear him screaming that he’s *innocent*, but the feds are louder. “Dustin Becker, you are under arrest for willfully committing tax fraud and insider trading…”

The voices echo and my vision blurs.

“Breathe and count,” Colson commands.

I nod fast. *One… two… three…*

“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law…”

“Four… Five… Six.” Colson’s fingers brush my side.

They haul Dad past us in handcuffs, a band of five agents escorting him to the door.

“You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you. Do you understand these rights as I have read them to you?”

“You can all go to Hell!” Dad shouts.

Just as they’re dragging him, kicking and fucking screaming, out of our home, his eyes lock with mine. If he was ever going to say something important—anything at all that would make him into something other than the worst person I’ve ever known—it would be now.

But the eyes of my father hold no remorse, and his lips stay firmly planted shut.

He doesn't shout that he loves us, or that he's *sorry*. And maybe it's better this way. Maybe it's better to know how little he thinks of us than to preserve the measly façade.

In the blink of an eye, my father is gone. If he was ever even here to begin with.

Colson drags me to the door so we can see what's happening. The feds are stuffing him into a police car while more of them pile out of a black SUV and storm up to our house. They brush past us inside, and maybe this proves how much of a nerd I am, but I can practically picture them in Stormtrooper armor.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?!" our mother hollers, clutching her chest in such an overdramatic display, it almost makes me laugh. "We've done nothing wrong! You can't just barge into my house and __"

"Ma'am, actually…" The female officer picks up the warrant my mom had tossed onto the floor and holds it up to her face. "We can."

"You're all just jealous!" Mom wails. "Ripping my husband away from his family like this! Who do you think you are?!"

"They're the US Government, Mom…" I mutter, rubbing my eyes while Colson rubs my back.

"Dustin!" Mom dashes to the door, really putting on the performance of a lifetime. "How could you?! You son-of-a-bitch!"

The shrill of her voice is accentuating the fuck out of my migraine. Watching her play this part, it's like twenty percent funny. But the other eighty percent is just sad.

Mom falls to her knees at the door and fake weeps into her hands. "In front of our children! You're monsters!"

"Jesus Christ… Alright, Meryl. Calm down," Colson grumbles. "This isn't *Mob Wives*. There are no cameras on you right now. Who is this little show even for??"

I hear one of the feds snort under his breath. It brings a smile to my lips, even though it's really not the time for laughter.

This is so fucked.

Mom pulls herself up off the floor and dramatically wipes her eyes. "Colson, enough! Your father is going to jail. Don't you care?"

Colson shrugs. “He’s probably guilty.”

“Shh!” Mom covers his mouth with her hand, glancing nervously at the feds.

That time I can’t help but laugh.

“So what happens now?” I ask, running fingers through my hair.

The female officer, who’s the only one speaking to us now that the tall, scary guy is outside with Dad in the cop car, gives me and my brother a sympathetic look, holding out the warrant for us.

“You have twenty-four hours to vacate the premises,” she tells us somberly. “You can pack your essentials, but basically this house and everything in it is being seized by the IRS.”

We’re all stone still for a solid twenty seconds. The sounds of feds shuffling around us are all I can hear. Well, that and a distinct ringing in my ears that feels serious.

Colson cackles. “Holy shit, really?”

I elbow him and he grunts.

“This can’t be happening…” This time Mom sinks to the floor for real.



COLSON DROPS his bag with a thunk.

“Wow. So this is it?” he murmurs, stepping farther into the small living room. “Oh shit, this really *is* it…”

“Your bedroom is upstairs,” Aunt Lily says, hauling one of Mom’s suitcases inside behind us. “It’s John’s old room.”

“*Bedroom*… meaning…” I blink a few times at her, then peek at Colson.

“You’ll have to share,” Lily finishes my thought. “There’s only the one extra room. I’m converting the dining room into a bedroom for your mom.”

Colson shoots me a look that makes it hard to swallow.

“Where *is* Mom?” I ask, changing the subject.

“She’s outside weeping,” Colson grunts, then grabs his bag once more, yanking mine out of my hand. “I’ll bring these to the upstairs of our *chalet*.”

His sarcastic tone is pretty damn snippy, but I don't think Aunt Lily picks up on it. Or she just doesn't care. She's too busy dragging our mother's bags into her house.

Glancing around the small room, I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, attempting to calm my anxiety.

This is it. Our new home.

We've officially been kicked out of the house we grew up in. Our mansion in Solana Beach was seized by the IRS, leaving us homeless. Also, our father is now in police custody, awaiting his bond hearing. His accounts have been frozen, and his credit cards cancelled. Which means we're also penniless.

More than anything, I'm *shocked* at how many things can change in a span of forty-eight hours.

I hate change. I mean, I physically *loathe* it. It makes my skin all hot and itchy, like I'm wearing a shirt made of fire ants. So this whole thing has been really fun for me.

And now, apparently, I'm picking up my brother's sarcasm habit.

Thank God for Mom's sister, Lily. The two barely ever speak, but I guess since Lily is a genuinely nice person, she put familial grievances aside and agreed to let us live with her until we figure out what happens next.

Her house is in Oceanside, a city near Carlsbad, though its relation doesn't necessarily mean it's anywhere near as good. Oceanside is sort of like Aunt Lily's house. It looks okay from the outside, but once you get in, you realize it kinda sucks.

In the blink of an eye, we've gone from the one percent to the rest. It's stressful, but honestly, the most stressful part for me isn't sharing a cramped bedroom with my brother, or worrying about how we'll come up with money to feed ourselves…

It's the idea of starting over at a new school halfway through junior year.

I had my groove going at Solana Prep. The faculty loved me, and I had a few *friends* in science club, though we all know that wasn't one of my strong suits. Still, we got along, despite my quietness. And most importantly, I was working toward UCLA. My guidance counselor even approached me about graduating a semester early, though I was never going to do it.

I can’t leave Colson.

Now that we’re apparently living in Oceanside for the foreseeable future, and have no more money for school, Colson and I will be enrolled starting next week in… public school.

Gulp.

Taking another quick peek outside, I see my mother, still sitting in the backseat of Aunt Lily’s Camry, sniffling and really just feeling sorry for herself. It’s annoying because we’re all in this together, and she should be checking on Colson and me, rather than whimpering and worrying about how she’ll afford to get her hair blown out.

Turning away, I stomp up the steps to our new bedroom, which used to belong to our cousin, John, before he graduated and joined the army. I don’t think we’ve seen him, or Aunt Lily, since Colson and I were toddlers. It’s kind of ridiculous to think about, what with how close they actually live to our house. Correction… our *former* house.

The upstairs here is even smaller than the downstairs, which makes some sense, though I think this entire house could fit comfortably inside our mansion in Solana without even touching anything. Sighing out loud, I remind myself to be humble, and grateful that we’re not in a homeless shelter. Things could always be worse.

And at least I have…

Peering inside the bedroom, I find Colson unpacking. But when I take a closer look, my chest warms. He’s unpacking my stuff for me, arranging my clothes in the top drawers of a rickety old dresser in the corner.

That’s the thing about my brother… Unintentionally, he gives me so much comfort. Even when he’s sometimes the one who causes my anxiety. *Worth it.*

His eyes flit to mine when he notices me standing at the entrance to the room. But he doesn’t say anything. Just goes back to folding my t-shirts and stuffing them into the drawer.

Looking around, the room is definitely cozy, which is a nice way of saying it’s tiny and cramped. I’m amazed Lily was even able to fit two twin beds in here. She’s been great at helping to get ready for us on such short notice. I think she said something about the church donating one of the beds, but I also think I intentionally blocked out the specifics.

“It’s crazy that we have family so close by and we never see them.” I attempt making conversation to distract from all the change currently giving

me hives. “I mean, I know John’s on active duty, but I’m sure he comes around sometimes. I think last time we saw him was at grandma’s funeral…”

“Yea, well, what do you expect?” Colson mumbles. “Mom’s a bitch. After she married Dad, she forgot all about who she was before him and turned into the person she’s always been deep down. A selfish cunt.”

I’m speechless for a moment. It’s strange because I know I feel the same way about our parents, but it’s buried underneath my pathological need to please everyone. To be positive and upbeat, even when all I want in the world is to fall on the ground and scream.

Stepping into the room, I try to pace, but it’s difficult with only a few feet of floor space available. “You’re right… and Dad’s side of the family is no better. I don’t see his parents reaching out to offer their help.”

“That’s also Mom’s fault. They hate her.” He scoops up an armful of my socks and dumps them into the drawer.

Chewing my lip, I take a seat on the bed across from him, bouncing on it a little. The sheets are crinkly like paper and the mattress feels like it’s made of Swiss cheese. Pretty big adjustment from my queen-sized memory foam draped in Egyptian cotton.

Okay, even in your mind, the whining needs to stop. You’re poor now. Get over it.

I’m really not trying to sound like a Saudi Arabian prince who’s being forced to stay at a Best Western, but I can’t exactly help it. We were raised with money. We’ve lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous literally since we came out of the womb.

Sure, our parents are neglectful sociopaths, but I don’t think I qualify for complaining since David Blaine *actually* performed at my eighth birthday.

“I can’t believe Dad did this…” I shake my head.

Colson looks up and cocks an eyebrow. “Can’t you?”

“Uh, not really.” I blink. “Sure, he has no discernible social conscience, but criminal tax fraud? Stealing millions of dollars from not only the government but also hard-working people? That’s like… really messed up.”

“Yea,” Colson scoffs out loud. “The same guy who kicked the shit out of me and broke my collarbone. Who smashed my Fender acoustic signed by Tom DeLonge because, in his words, I’m *not worthy*, I’m *worthless*.” His features tighten in his anger. “He deserves to rot in prison.”

My fingers twist in my lap. “Col… I mean… Look at it from his point of view.”

I know I’ve made a mistake the moment the words leave my lips. Colson turns a withering glare on me, the glistening of his irises slicing me like green shards of glass. With the light from outside streaming in through partially drawn curtains, I can really see the dark circles under his eyes, and the pin-dot size of his pupils.

“Are you saying I deserved to have the shit kicked out of me by my own father?” He speaks quietly, that usual rasp to his voice giving me chills of fright this time, instead of the warm ones.

The calmness of his tone does not placate me. In fact, it worries me more. He’s like a poisonous rattlesnake that takes a moment to stare at you before it lunges.

“No.” My head moves back and forth on repeat. “No, I’m not saying that at all. What he did was atrocious. I just think… um…”

Colson drops what he was holding and steps up to me, his feet knocking into mine. I swallow hard as he leans down, aligning our faces. “What *do* you think, good twin?”

It takes me a moment of shivering before I whisper, “You know it was wrong.”

There’s a kaleidoscope of emotions in his eyes as he stares at me, tension sweeping up around us like a cloud of dust.

He has to know that what we’ve done together is wrong. I know it, myself.

But what I’m not saying, what I’ll continue clutching tight to my chest for as long as I can hold it, is that I still want it, regardless. I crave it, in fact, so deep that it feels like it’s been a part of me for as long as he has.

And the *wrong* of it all might just make it feel that much better to set free.

Colson swallows visibly, his Adam’s apple doing a quick bob that causes me to shift in my seat before he slowly straightens up and clears his throat.

My brother keeps his feelings under Fort Knox-like security. But there are rare displays every now and again that tell me things he refuses to say out loud. The one I’m getting right now is that he’s ashamed. And if I know Colson—which *ya know*—then things like shame and regret morph quickly

into anger and bitterness. And ever since he got back from boarding school, I've noticed an increase in his unwavering refusal to admit he's hurting.

Things have been eating at him more and more over the last few months, and he's wearing that stress on his face. I just want to tell him I'm here for him. That I'm sorry I brought up the kiss, even though I'm kind of not because it was… *incredible*. And right now, I really need him, more than ever.

But I don't say that, because I'm afraid too. I'm *terrified* of the wickedness growing inside me.

"Don't worry about it," Colson finally grunts, then sniffs and pushes his hair out of his eyes while refusing to look at me. "It was just a game anyway, and you lost." He stomps to the door, muttering on his way out, "And it'll never happen again."

I sit on the tiny bed in the tiny bedroom of our tiny new home, until the sun disappears outside, settling in with the unsettling.

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5

COLSON



Cyrus and I split a Stoffer’s frozen lasagna for dinner.

It was pretty small for two sixteen-year-olds with seething animal appetites. But then again, it was really the only option.

Our credit cards are maxed out, and the fridge is as close to empty as one can get. Aunt Lily’s working until midnight, and she only brings leftovers from the restaurant on occasion, so it’s not good to rely on it.

And Mom’s out. Trying to reel herself in a rich guy.

She’s been fishing for new husbands since before Dad was even sentenced. She must have a sixth sense about impending criminal charges, because even though Dad’s attorney was confident for time served plus fines and some sort of community service, Mom has been getting her slutty ducks in a row since her husband was denied bail. I guess all those offshore accounts, the private jet, and that tropical island he bought made him seem like a *flight risk*.

As it turns out, Dad’s lawyer is just as much of a crook as he is, because he lost the case.

Dustin Becker was sentenced to twenty years in a federal prison, and in case you can’t tell, I’m all broken up inside.

That was three months ago, and we’re still living in squalor, I mean *Oceanside*, with Aunt Lily. We have as little money as people can have without being actually homeless, and truth be told, I’m not hating it as much as I maybe should.

My stuff was already pretty torn and ratty, I never cared about going to school at Solana Prep, or anywhere for that matter, and I know from personal experience that Aunt Lily's Camry can whip on the highway.

Not being able to go to In-N-Out whenever I want kinda sucks. But I make do by occasionally skulking around the neighborhood at dinner time and snagging people's DoorDash deliveries. Last weekend, I drove up to the frat house of a nearby university and pretended I went there to accept an order. Cyrus and I feasted like kings on more Taco Bell than any human should be allowed to consume in one sitting.

Another thing that hasn't really changed much since we've been here is that we barely ever see Mom. I was worried for a minute there when our lives were turned upside down that we'd be stuck with her trying to act like she gave a shit about us. Thankfully, that didn't happen.

Carla has a job at the restaurant with Aunt Lily, but from what I can tell she doesn't work that many shifts. Just enough to pay for a family plan of cell phones for us and give Lily occasional money for gas.

The rest of the time she's out, at benefits and galas, reusing the same seven or eight designer dresses she was able to snag before the IRS seized the rest, pretending everything is *fine* while secretly flaunting herself as some kind of demented Showcase Showdown prize to any blind fool with too much money.

I don't like to pay her compliments often, because where would that get me? But if there's one thing I could say about Carla Whittle-Becker, it's that she's like a cockroach. You can smash her with a magazine and spray her with Lysol, but she'll still do her damnedest to scurry away.

Our father's arrest made national news, meaning not only did we have some lame paparazzi tools following us around for a few weeks, but also fitting in at the new school started out rocky. Cyrus and I were immediately pinned as the former rich kids of a douchey criminal. To some of them, it made us cool and interesting. But to the other more insecure ones, it made us a target.

Unluckily for them, I've never been one to shy away from confrontation.

By our first week at Orenthal James Simpson Academy—*that's not really the name of it, I'm just making a point*—I was suspended for three days. For me it was fine, since I didn't want to be there, anyway. But when I

came back, I found out a few of the assholes whose asses I'd fed to them were picking on my brother, which is just unac-fucking-ceptable.

I showed them the error of their ways once again. And ended up suspended for another week.

So… it's been touch-and-go at school.

Cyrus really hates it. He's miserable, and I feel bad. I don't understand loving school and education, but I know that to my brother it's a huge part of his personality. He's basically a walking Encyclopedia, which, sure, makes him a target for the posers at our new school. But that's why I'm here. It's why I've always been here.

To take care of him.

A chill moves through me unexpectedly, and I nestle myself deeper into the worn old couch in Aunt Lily's living room. I'm watching *Family Guy* on TBS because we don't even have enough money for Netflix or Hulu… or Wi-Fi. Cyrus is reading on the chair next to me, and I'm trying to pretend I don't hear his stomach rumbling after that unsatisfying lasagna.

Dr. Roberts would say my excessive need to protect and care for my brother is *unprecedented* and *willfully bizarre*. He always said stuff like that, and now it's stuck in my brain, even though I don't see him anymore because we can't afford health insurance, let alone charlatans like that old fool.

But still, I often find myself remembering what he used to say… Which is annoying because it makes me feel like I'm not in control of my own thoughts. I've always worked really hard at acting like I don't care what people think about me. And truthfully, most of the time, I don't. But when your deepest insecurities are shone back at you by someone holding up a mirror in front of your face, forcing you to acknowledge things you've fought to stuff down… it's unsettling. More than that.

It's fucking bullshit.

I'm not sure what is wrong with me exactly. All I know is that when I stopped seeing Dr. Roberts, and came off the medication he was giving me for what he'd diagnosed as *Narcissistic Personality Disorder,* I started to feel like my old self again.

And that scared the shit out of me.

I'm not supposed to want to feel like myself, because *myself* is riddled with bad things.

Now that my thoughts are unleashed the way they are, I can't stop watching Cyrus in my peripheral. Remembering what he said the day we moved in here…

You know it was wrong.

I have no idea why those words hurt me so much. I think maybe it's because of course I *know* it. I'm not a moron.

It's wrong to kiss your brother. And to… taunt him into jerking off next to you.

No shit, Sherlock.

But I thought I was doing it for him. To help him come to terms with what he really wants.

My brother has no confidence in anything other than his big brain. When it comes to his personal life, well… he barely has one. And that's because he's afraid to admit who he is. I thought I could help him with that, but then it turned into something else… A new thing for him to feel bad about. Which just made me hate myself even more.

I don't want Cyrus to resent me the way I resent everyone.

"Is that not bothering you?" His voice jolts me out of my head, and I tilt my face in his direction. He mirrors it. "That music outside."

My gaze narrows at him for a moment, since I have no idea what he's talking about. But then I pick up the TV remote, mute the show, and listen.

"Oh… yea." I nod. "Now I hear it."

"*Now* you hear it??" He scoffs. I can't help but smirk. "It feels like a parade is happening inside my skull."

My grin widens as I flutter my lashes at him. "Someone's cranky."

His cheeks flush—signature Cyrus move—and he fiddles with the page of his book. "Sorry, I'm just… tired. And hungry."

Things happen to me inside when I see him like this. When I know he needs me in some way, it's as if my chemistry shifts and my body reacts, like a protector. I don't know where it comes from. I'm not trying to feel like this about my own brother, but it just happens so naturally.

It's like my wires are crossed or something. Dr. Roberts told me I wasn't born this way… That I made myself like this, and I can fix it by denying these feelings. Ignoring them, and channeling them into something else.

When am I gonna get that asshole out of my head?

“You know, it does sound like there’s a festival or something going on out there,” I tell Cyrus, and his chin lifts in my direction. “I bet they’d have food.”

He gawks at me for a moment, the excitement already shining in his eyes. “But we don’t have any money.”

I give him a look. “Please.”

A smile creeps up on his lips as he nods. “Okay. Let’s do it.”

In a flourish, we’re hopping into our shoes and bolting out the door.

The late July heat is lingering in the air as we walk toward the music. Sunset is upon us, so it’s still technically light out, though it’s dimmed just enough, a breeze in the air which feels nice compared to how stifling it felt earlier in the day. Cyrus and I trek down the sidewalk, cutting in between the small houses and apartment complexes, all cramped together like an urban forest.

This neighborhood isn’t the best. It’s not *awful*, but still Aunt Lily advises us not to go out alone at night, and to avoid certain areas. Basically, the ones we’re walking into right now.

We’re only a few blocks from home and not only is the music growing louder, but there’s a smell that’s beckoning to us like one of those steam hands in the cartoons.

“God, that smells fucking incredible,” I purr, already drooling at the idea of grilled meats.

“Right? When was the last time we had any kind of barbecue?” Cyrus scuttles to keep up with my power-walking.

I lift my wrist to check a watch I don’t have. “Hmm… let’s see. According to my calendar, I think it was last Nevuary.”

Cyrus laughs out loud, sparking in my gut like the strike of a match. My teeth grind together, and I remind myself to ignore it.

Push it away. Fight it.

“Check it out!” He gasps, distracting me from my inner turmoil with his pointing across the street.

Sure enough, there it is. A big block party, which right now, looks like actual Heaven on earth.

Jay-walking the fuck out of that street, we dash over to the party, our wide eyes taking in the sights. There are a bunch of grills set up everywhere, those long banquet tables covered with plates and trays of all different foods. The music is coming from a band that’s set up about a block

from here. And now that I'm in the thick of it, I think this is definitely some kind of Hispanic festival.

Assessing our surroundings, I do spot many an overly muscled, tattooed guy. But there are also women and children here, so I think it's safe to say we won't be jumped. Not yet, anyway.

"Do you think they'll let us eat?" Cyrus sounds unsure. I don't need to look at him to know he's fidgeting in place, biting his lip, and doing that thing where he rubs his chest. "Maybe we should just leave. I don't think we belong here…"

His social anxiety is kicking in fast, which usually happens in crowds like this. But I also know how badly he wants to be here, because of the food and general merriment, so I can probably help him relax. If he can pull through for Comic Con, I'm sure he can stand at least fifteen minutes with a group of strangers who haven't even glanced our way yet.

"Oh, we're staying." I poke him in the side, and he flinches, shooting me an angry glare that makes me smirk. "There's absolutely no way I'm leaving without trying some of that."

I nod at the grill closest to us, covered in sizzling pork and pineapple. Grabbing his arm, I drag him closer while he puts on the brakes.

"But aren't they gonna ask for money or something?? I doubt they'll just *give* us—"

"Hi there!" I wave at one of the ladies who's plating food. She glances at me and smiles. "We live around the corner, and we smelled the food. What's going on over here?"

"Every year we have a block party to celebrate the Guelaguetza Festival," she tells me. "We've been celebrating it since we were children, and we want to pass that tradition on, even away from home."

I show her a polite grin. "Well, it seems like an awesome tradition. This is quite the feast."

She chuckles, then without any further prompting, hands me a plate. "Enjoy. The more the merrier."

"Gracias."

"De nada." She hands one to Cyrus, and I'm sure both of our smiles could be seen from outer space.

We bring our plates over to the sidewalk and plop down, watching all the festivities while immediately digging into the best damn al pastor I've ever tasted in my life.

“This is awesome,” Cyrus mumbles while scarfing down his food. “They’re so nice!”

“Yea. People who aren’t rich tend to be.”

He peeks at me. “You’re right. Imagine if a stranger walked up to one of Mom’s garden parties?”

We both laugh. Then we stop because it’s actually not funny. It’s ridiculous. Hosting parties with invitations, hiring caterers and decorators and stylists. All for a fucking barbecue you could just have in the street, apparently.

I’m not saying I didn’t like my life from before in Solana Beach. Except that’s exactly what I’m saying. Being here, it’s freeing.

The only thing I miss is living on the beach. But even here, the ocean is only a twenty-minute walk. And of course, I miss my guitar.

Without even noticing it, I’ve been staring at the band, watching the guy playing guitar and missing the feeling. Dad broke my favorite one when I came back from boarding school, as if breaking my bones wasn’t enough. I still had a couple of others, but they were taken away with everything else.

Even though my father cancelled my guitar lessons when I was a kid, I’d learned more than enough of the basics by that point. The rest I taught myself, just from listening to my favorite music and replicating it. It’s something I truly love to do, and the only person who’s ever even tried to support me in my music is Cyrus. Although I didn’t make it easy on him when I stopped harmonizing and started screaming.

We finish our food and just sit for a while. Sunlight fades away, and the streetlights become the illumination for a party that shows no sign of slowing.

“Come on,” Cyrus says out of nowhere and stands up. “I have an idea.”

I give him a puzzled look, but stand up anyway, following him over to where the band is playing. When we get there, he does something out of character and pulls one of the guys in the band aside. I’m trying to eavesdrop until I realize he’s speaking Spanish to him—one of the four languages Cy is fluent in. And I’m just standing there, watching him while trying to smother a grin that wants to take over my lips.

“Gracias, muchas gracias.” Cyrus is all smiles as he rushes back over to me. Then he lets out a breath. “Okay. You’re up.”

I can’t help feeling momentarily flabbergasted. “Say what now?”

“I asked him if you could play a song, and he said yes.” The way his face is beaming, you’d think this was something that means a lot to *him*.

My mouth hangs open for a moment while I process what he’s saying. “Are you being serious?”

“Yea.” He nods enthusiastically. “I know you’ve missed playing. And when we were sitting over there, you were eyeing the guy’s guitar like an ex-lover.” He chuckles. Then his cheeks flush and he looks away, clearing his throat.

My grin survives all my attempts at crushing it. The thing’s relentless. “Okay… Wow. This is awesome. What should I play…?”

Cyrus pauses for a few seconds in thought before his eyes widen. “Ooh! Do the David Bowie cover.”

I immediately know what he’s talking about. “You got it, kiddo.” I wink at him, and he shakes his head.

“I’m five minutes older than you!” he shouts after me.

But I’m already walking over to the very supportive stranger who’s smiling and handing over his acoustic guitar. I’m really just up in my own excitement, so I don’t even realize that there are eyes on me until I take a seat on the stool, checking the tune.

Fortunately, I’ve never suffered from social anxiety the way Cy does. He couldn’t even join the debate team because of his fear of public speaking. And that’s a club full of ultimate nerds.

Adjusting the mic on the stand, I launch right into the beginning of *Rebel Rebel*. One of my favorite Bowie songs. It’s a super recognizable melody, though very different music from what these guys were just playing. I think that’s part of the intrigue because mere seconds into my performance and there’s a huge crowd forming.

As I begin to sing the lyrics, everything else just fades away. The worries and doubts. The stresses that pile up inside my head…

It’s as if performing injects antibiotics directly into my bloodstream, combatting the diseases that flow through my veins. I’m at home in this. And after the first chorus, when I peek up into the crowd of people I don’t know, swaying and dancing, the only person I see is my brother. Like there’s a spotlight on him.

He’s smiling, wider and brighter than he has since the day our father was arrested.

I’m doing that. *I’m* making it happen.

Fuck you, Dr. Roberts. If this feeling is wrong, then I definitely have no interest in being right.

When I finish the song, everyone claps and cheers. It's really fucking awesome.

I hand the guitar back to the guys, who are all patting me on the back, saying *bueno bueno*. Cyrus staggers up to me and they hand us both red solo cups. I'm not sure what's in it, but a quick sniff tells me it's something strong. I lift it to Cy, and we cheers, taking our sips. The fruity burn works well with the adrenaline fizzling inside me.

Cyrus coughs and I laugh.

"Thanks for that, G." I take another sip, bigger this time.

"Anything for you."

As soon as the words leave his lips, his face freezes and a pink blush fills his cheeks. It could be from the liquor, but I know it isn't.

He wasn't supposed to say that out loud.

I swallow hard, unable to stop looking at him the way I am. But I have to stop. I *have to* because as much as I wish it weren't, this is bad. And sneaking it away in a dark room is one thing, but exposing it to light…

It's like a Gremlin.

Stuffing it all down, I clear my throat and finish my drink, glancing around the party. Now that the drinks are flowing, it seems like there are fewer kids around and more adults getting rowdy. On my left is a gorgeous girl who's eyeing me pretty hard. She sees me looking at her and grins, tucking her hair behind her ear.

My eyes flit back to my brother who's shifting on his feet, sipping from his cup and wincing as he does. Then they return to the girl.

I *should* be looking at the girl. She's the right person to look at.

The conversation with Cyrus plays back in my mind once more…

And the words of my former psychiatrist.

It's unhealthy, Colson. The things you think about your brother are like a sickness. You must fight it with your mind, the way your body would fight against disease.

Keep fighting it. Lock it away.

"Hey, I'll be right back," I mumble to Cyrus, not waiting for him to respond before I'm strolling over to the girl with the sex eyes.

She's certainly beautiful; exotic, dark wavy hair, full lips. Big tits.

I gulp down some burning uncertainties that are trying to rise in my throat as I lean in close to her. “How’s it going?”

“Great.” Her light, airy voice slinks into my ear, giving me the chills. “I loved your performance.” She twirls her hair around her finger as she looks up at me. She’s pretty short, and I’m about six feet, so she has to crane her neck. “You have a beautiful voice.”

“Thanks,” I reply, clenching my jaw.

There’s this magnetic draw in my eyes that keeps trying to pull them to where my brother is. I’m trying really hard to fight it, but it’s so strong.

The girl is saying something, but I can’t focus on her. My eyes flit to where I left Cyrus, but he’s gone. Panic fills my limbs as my gaze swings around, frantically looking for him for only about five seconds before I find him over by a table of what looks like desserts. He’s scooping tres leches cake into a bowl. Then he picks up a churro and takes a bite.

Cy and his sweet tooth.

My attention comes back to the girl when I realize she just asked me something and is waiting for a response. “Uh… what?”

She stammers, “I um, said my name is Mariana. Then I asked what’s yours…?”

“Oh. Colson,” I rumble, trying to sound more interested than I’m feeling.

She smiles. “Nice to meet you, Colson…”

Her voice sort of cuts out again when my eyes slink back to Cyrus. This time when I spot him, I almost fall down.

There’s a guy talking to him. A guy who might be close to our age, but he looks older. The way my brain is choosing to process him, he’s *way* too old to be talking to my brother. We just turned seventeen, and this guy looks like he’s almost thirty.

A silent gasp forms on my lips. He’s *smiling* at him! *My* Cyrus!

I mean, my *brother*.

Blinking hard, I shake myself out of it and glance back down at the girl. “I’m sorry… what were you saying?”

Her forehead lines. “I was asking if you wanted to go for a walk?”

I nod slowly, peering over to where Cyrus is awkwardly squirming around while some guy with eyes that are way too blue for real life engages him in obviously unwanted conversation.

Get it through your thick skull, asshole! He’s not interested.

“Look at that guy,” I mutter out loud to the girl. “He approaches my brother out of nowhere like he’s… what? A piece of meat??”

“I think they’re just talking…”

I scowl at the girl. “Yea, well… what do you know.”

Stalking away from her, blood is rushing in my ears, my eyes locked onto the perverted creeper who’s coming on to my twin. *I refuse to let Cyrus be drugged and molested by this scumbag.*

Stomping up to Cy, I catch the tail-end of the guy asking if he wants to go somewhere and talk. With zero chill, I grunt, “He’s not interested. Walk away.”

The guy gives me a look, eyes darting back and forth between us for the *identical twin realization*. Then he flashes a very toothpaste-commercial-like smile at us both.

“Two is better than one,” he croons. Then he winks at me.

Ugh.

Cyrus chokes on the sip of his drink he was using as a buffer, while I get up in the rude stranger’s face.

“I said walk away,” I growl at him, fist tightening at my side.

The guy holds up his hands and wanders off, with my threatening glare on his back.

I’m fucking *seething*. “We’re leaving.”

Cyrus just shrugs and nods at my command. You’ll never get an argument from him when it comes to leaving a social gathering.

Weaving through all the people talking, laughing, dancing, and shouting, we head back toward our street. As we’re exiting the block party, I sneak over to one of the tables with all the booze and snatch a bottle of Don Julio. Cyrus and I hightail it out of there before anyone notices, giggling like children while we go.

As irate as I was just two minutes ago, I’m actually feeling pretty nice. I have a sweet buzz going, and knowing that Cyrus is with me and away from the prying eyes of attractive molesters allows me to breathe easier. We get back to the house, which is still empty and quiet. The only sounds to be heard are those of our breaths and our footsteps ascending the stairs to our shared bedroom.

Cyrus stumbles inside and spins to face me. There’s something about the way he’s looking at me that’s pulling at a thread inside my mind.

I lift up the bottle in my hand. “Time to celebrate.”

He grins and runs lazy fingers through his hair, visibly pretty tipsy himself. “What are we celebrating?”

I pop the top off the bottle, holding it up for a toast. “To *the* Guadala-whatever festival.”

Cyrus laughs while I take a swig of the tequila, humming through the burn before shoving the bottle at him. He takes a much smaller sip, cringing as he does.

“Did you know…” he slurs, handing the bottle back to me. “That the Guelaguetza Festival is a cultural fair for Oxaca? Usually, it’s celebrated around the anniversary of the death of Benito Juarez.” He hiccups and I chuckle.

“Actually, I *did* know that,” I tease him, rolling my eyes.

He grins and goes to push me playfully. But it doesn’t really work that way.

Instead, his palms land on my chest. And they sort of stay there.

My breathing shallows, our eyes locked together while he sucks his lower lip into his mouth. I take another large gulp of tequila. *Patron saints give me strength.*

“Benito Juarez was responsible for many of the democratic advances in Mexico,” Cyrus goes on rambling, quiet and raspy, hands still resting on my chest. “His political fights actually go back to Napoleon, who was trying to establish French power in Mexico in…”

His voice trails, I think because he’s noticing that I can’t stop watching his mouth. I swallow, my body burning with a fever as my hand slides gradually onto Cyrus’s hip. He lets out a soft noise. I’m so dizzy I might pass out.

This is bad… I’m supposed to be fighting it. I’m supposed to be listening to him spout facts, nodding along politely, not watching his mouth and… I swallow again.

I should’ve stayed to talk to the girl. I should’ve…

Lifting the bottle in my right hand to his mouth, I murmur, “Drink.”

And he does, without question.

Slowly, I pour some liquor between his parted lips, and he swallows it. When I lower the bottle, he licks his lips, pupils blown out in a sea of green. I hadn’t even noticed how close we’re standing until I feel the hard shape in his pants graze mine.

That thread inside, the one he's been pulling… It unravels me completely.

I can't fight it anymore.

I drop the bottle on the floor with a clunk, and before I know what I'm doing, my hands are on his jaw and my mouth is on his. I spin him fast, pushing him into the bedroom door until it slams shut, instantly grinding myself against him while we breathe each other in. The sounds of wet suction and ragged breaths ring through the room, the music of us giving into greedy temptation overwhelming that of the block party still audible in the background.

Cyrus is whimpering in my mouth, gripping my shirt in his fists while he writhes into me.

"I th-thought you said… it would never happen again," he murmurs, his movements pleading for more.

Like he's been dying of starvation for over a year, and now he's *finally* being fed his favorite meal again. I love it way too much.

My hand moves to his throat while I hold him still, panting over his mouth, "But you're mine."

He nods fast. And I crumble to bits.

This feels so different from last time. We're both bigger than we were before, and far hungrier. And this time, I'm not teaching him anything other than how a ravenous animal devours its prey.

The taste of tart liquor in his mouth drives me crazy while I lick and suck and bite him, our hard bodies bumping together. The taut feeling of him beneath my fingers is a wicked sin I'm not supposed to want. Something so *forbidden*, it sets me wildly ablaze.

Yanking him off the door, I turn us, and we kiss over to the nearest bed; his. I shove him down onto it, immediately crawling over him, magnetized to his mouth; that sweet, hot, wet place I want to live inside for the rest of my days.

We're making out furiously, grinding our erections together through our pants, precum leaking all over the inside of my boxers at the sensation. More than a year has gone by since the last time we did this, and yet we fall back into it like it's as easy as breathing. Why is that?

I know why. I've been fighting it for years.

The night Dad kicked the shit out of me, I sprouted a hatred inside; thirsty in its need for action. That night, when I gave Cyrus his first kiss, I

savored the licks, the punches and broken bones from my father, the same way I savored the taste of my brother. I took it all like a champ, the pleasure and the pain, because I know I deserve it.

I *deserve* to hurt for doing what I do with him. But I deserve him, too. That's what no one else seems to understand. Cyrus is *mine* to take from, and he always has been.

He's scared and excited right now. I can feel it in him, just like the last time. I can hear in his pants and his whimpers how badly he's missed me since the night I kissed him. And the one after that, when we touched ourselves… together.

My brother is gay, and he's afraid to admit it, which is why I showed him the straight porn that night. Once more, I was trying to help him figure himself out. Even if *I'm* not gay, I'm not supposed to be, what I *am* supposed to be is his protector, his teacher.

No one else in the whole goddamn world would understand it, but this—*us*—is right.

I *feel* how badly he's been craving it. And when your heart is calling for someone else… wrong can't be helped.

"Are you worried?" I breathe in between the greedy work of our lips.

"Mmmff," he groans, arching up into me.

I can't help but grin over his mouth, pulling back just enough so the tips of our identical noses are touching. "Are you worried that someone might find out?"

The teal waves in his eyes crest and break. "Hasn't stopped us before."

Humming, I lean in, lashing his bottom lip with my tongue. He shivers, and I'm fucking high. Drunk on this lust swimming stronger than any toxin in my veins. Watching his lips tremble for me sends a jolt to my balls, my cock twitching with need between us.

And in the interest of helping him…

I whisper a plea onto my brother's eager mouth. "Suck me. *Please*, gorgeous."

He turns into a quivering ball of desire beneath me, shifting his hands from where they were gripping my waist. He gives me that nervous look of his, though his pupils are swallowing up the irises while his trembling fingers unbutton my jeans, then unzip them. And he flashes one last hesitant glance before stuffing his hand inside.

He groans when his palm grazes my erection, over the boxers, but still. We've never touched before. He's never had his hand on a dick that isn't his. And it's safe to say he loves it. I can feel how hard he is as he absentmindedly pushes his hips upward to rub himself on my thigh.

"Go inside the boxers," I rumble.

His cheeks are flushed like crazy as he nods, slipping inside my Calvins to cup my aching cock. Flesh on flesh prompts breathy moans of forbidden excitement from us both. He wraps his fist around my dick and jerks it slowly while my hips chase the magnificent feeling of his inexperienced stroking.

Needing to do *something*, I drop my face into the crook of his neck, licking and sucking his pulse while he plays with my cock, the both of us sweating through our clothes. Sitting back, I tug my shirt over my head. Then I push my pants and boxers down farther, so my whole cock is exposed. Cyrus gazes up at me, flushed with hooded eyes, his chest moving up and down through strong breaths while I pull his shirt up slowly, revealing the definition in his stomach and chest, matching mine.

We're definitely not *bulky*, but we stay in shape. It seems almost effortless, but we're still young. Looking him over, the only difference between our bodies is his fresh, pale virgin skin. Whereas mine is marked up with ink and a few scars.

I'm lost in what we're doing, moving on autopilot as I open his pants and push them down enough to expose his dick, too. When I press them together, he lets out a desperate noise.

Biting my lip, I roll off of him, putting us side by side. He gives me a bemused look.

"You wanna learn how, don't you?" I raise my brow at him.

He already knows what I mean, his eyes stuck on my cock for many praising seconds before they slide up to mine and he nods. "Yea. I *really* do."

"Go for it, good twin." Leaning back, I make myself comfortable.

Timidly, he crawls over me, then gazes down like he wants to kiss me again. So I lick my lip, inviting him to do whatever the hell he wants.

Pressing his pillowed lips to mine, he kisses me slowly, softly and so fucking *Cyrus*, it sends a hard jerk to my erection, which is being pinned down by his. He whines and sucks my lower lip between his, nipping at it with his teeth.

“Mm… good,” I rasp, my toes curling. Which reminds me…

I kick off my sneakers, and they clunk onto the floor. Cyrus does the same before moving his soft lips down my throat. He kisses a wet line down my sternum, trailing my abs, sliding his way down my body until he’s positioned with his face before my waist. He glances up at me, then extends his tongue to swipe the head of my cock.

A breath gusts from my lips while I stare down at him, our eyes locking as he does it again, curling his tongue around the tip. I can’t even help the way my hips lift off the bed and my hand flies to his jaw.

“*So* good,” I purr, and he uses his newfound confidence, sucking me into his mouth while humming around me.

My head falls back onto the pillow, eyelids fluttering shut as he sucks up and down, gradually, because I know he hasn’t done it before, but also with enough zeal that I’m sure he’s thought a lot about it.

And in my mind, he’s only thought about doing this to *me*.

But thinking it reminds me of the other mouths my dick has been in, all of whom belonged to girls. So I guess in a way this is my first time, too. *My first time letting a boy suck my cock.*

Swallowing down my hang-ups, I force them away. *This doesn’t make me gay. I’m just helping him.…*

He lets me glide into the back of his throat and I unfurl beneath him. “*Cyrus*… Jesus, that feels… *yes*.”

He groans on my cock, writhing against the bed while he picks up the pace, just a bit, encouraged by my words of praise. He’s not going fast by any means, and I like it. I love how it feels like he’s worshipping my cock with his mouth. And before I know what’s happening, I’m chasing an orgasm. Gripping his hair in my fist, humping his mouth while spit flows.

I’ve never heard anything quite like the symphony of his breaths while I pump between his lips; such sweet, forbidden melodies.

“Suck me harder, good twin,” I grunt, both hands on his head, guiding him up and down. “Your tongue feels fucking perfect on my thick cock.”

His eyes roll back, the vibrations of his moans rumbling into me. I’m swirling and swirling up into a twister of impending pleasure, ready to plummet. As badly as my eyes want to close, I can’t stop watching my brother sucking on my dick; his jet-black hair mussed up in my fist, pink lips engulfing my shaft while he swallows me whole.

It’s *intoxicating*. A blowjob has never, *ever* felt like this before.

My hips surge and a chill breaks. And I fall.

"I'm… I'm coming," I tell him. "B-baby, I'm *coming* for you."

In my haze, I don't even know what I'm saying. Or what I'm doing. Common courtesy would be to let go of his head, but I can't. I just want him to drink me down, more than I've ever wanted anything.

My balls throb and ache through my orgasm, pulses of cum shooting into his mouth. He stiffens for a second, but then he swallows. And apparently, he likes it, because he sucks on my dick like he wants more. Swallowing and sucking, sucking and swallowing, he pulls out every last drop while I twitch and shiver, and gasp for air.

I'm out of sorts for minutes, just sinking into the bed, all fuzzy and warm. Nothing is *wrong*. Everything is *perfect*.

I'm happy and content, and it's fucking mesmerizing. *This is very fucking good.*

Blissed out beyond belief, I watch as Cy's mouth releases my sated cock. His breathing is harsh, and for a moment I worry that he might need his inhaler. But then he sits up, wraps a fist around his giant erection and begins to stroke it.

Our eyes stay on one another's while he pulls at his dick, roughly jerking. He falls forward onto his hands and knees over me and presses his forehead to mine while he beats it faster and faster.

My stomach clenches in arousal, my dick waking up already.

"You gonna come for me?" I ask him, and he nods fast.

I couldn't control my actions if I tried. His mouth, the one that just swallowed all my cum, is right fucking there. *Begging* for me.

So I pull him down and kiss him hard, desperate to suck my own flavor off his tongue. And I swat his hand away, curling my fingers around his cock to stroke it myself.

He cries into my mouth, and I gasp back. This is fucking crazy, but it feels sublime. I've never jerked a dick that wasn't my own. And Cyrus has never been touched by anyone but himself.

We're breaking through so many boundaries and it drives me absolutely wild with lust.

"I want you to come on me." The words fall from my lips into his mouth. "Come all over me, good twin."

"I'm… *Fuck*, I'm going to…" His words snap in half, and he cries softly on my lips while an orgasm breaks from his dick, shooting all over

my chest and my abs.

"*Mmm*… that's good, Cy." I pull his jaw. "Watch your big dick come on your brother."

He whimpers, breathless, hoarse and shaking all over while he drenches me. His cock finally stops pulsing in my grip, but I don't let it go. I don't want to.

I drag the head through his orgasm. "Wipe it on my cock," I grunt breathlessly. And he does.

He drags his softening dick through the slickness on my abs, then he rubs us together, making a big, sticky mess. His balls brush my own, and they're so sensitive it makes me flinch, my eyes falling shut as more cum leaks from my cock.

Cyrus, unable to hold himself up any longer, crashes onto me, nestling his body weight on mine and breathing softly into my neck. His lips press tender kisses on me while my fingers run up and down his back.

We lie like this for a while, in his bed, just thinking. Considering how terrible it would be if we kept this up, in secret, of course. I know he's thinking the same thing. We're connected, after all.

Obviously, it can never be more than a hidden fantasy we play out in the dark. It's a disgraceful thing we've created here…

But he can't stop himself from wanting it, and I can't stop myself from giving it to him. The way I see it, there's no fucking point in fighting. I want to make him feel good, always, because no one else will give him the things I can.

We've already sacrificed ourselves to the sin, like a door torn off its hinges; opened permanently.

There's no saving us now.

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6

TAUREN



Green is my favorite color.

It has nothing to do with money. I just love the color green, in all shades. It means growth, and harmony. New energy.

That's what I like to envision when I think of my new wealth. Not just the overwhelming greed that money brings; the slobbering lusts of capitalist America.

I like to think of it as a rebirth for myself.

I grew up poor. Not detrimentally so. I was never homeless or starved, thank God. But I lived most of my life in a small two-bedroom house in Venice Beach with my aunt, Sylvia. And while I still happen to love Venice, and I'll always consider it my home, I had next to nothing growing up. Nothing but the base food and shelter and some thrift store clothes, which again, I'm so damn grateful for.

But the shift of my life is something I'm still adapting to. *Knight-Life*, my startup, of which I am the CFO, just began to gain traction in the last couple of years. And then twelve months ago, it blew the fuck up.

And I became a millionaire at thirty-five.

In what feels like an eye-blink, I've gone from struggling to put up enough to invest in my dreams, to getting dressed in my best tailored clothes, hopping into my Maserati, and peeling out of the gated community where I live in Carlsbad.

It’s strange, how it all worked out. So much faster than I thought it would. After years of working at it, developing software and finding investors, it all paid off.

Just like my UCLA tuition bill.

I’m not bragging, I’m just setting up the backdrop for what’s happening now, and money is a huge part of that.

I’m driving to Oceanside, which is a bit farther than I’d like to go for a date… But this is no ordinary date.

I’m meeting my girlfriend’s kids.

Carla is thirty-four, divorced, and living with her boys at her sister’s house. We’ve only been seeing each other for a couple of months, but it’s been fun. She, too, came from nothing. It’s actually one of the very few things we seem to have in common, and it’s one she likes to pretend doesn’t exist.

Carla was married to a man named Dustin Becker for just shy of twenty years. You might recognize his name from the news…

Late last year, he was arrested for insider trading and owing two million dollars to the IRS. It was a crazy story. The biggest media frenzy in a decade.

Dustin is currently residing in a federal prison, and after all of their family’s assets were seized, it left Carla, along with their kids, with nothing. Hence them living with her sister. And while I choose not to get into it right now, this whole thing might be a main reason why I’ve decided to take on this relationship.

My perpetually bleeding heart wouldn’t allow me to leave someone down and out like this.

I know I’m not responsible for Carla, or her boys. But I have this thing inside me… This conscience complex that makes it impossible for me not to ride in like a white knight and save the day. I’ve always been like this. The guy who offers up what little he has for others. Who dates the girls fresh out of abusive relationships, hoping I can heal them in some way.

It sounds just as ridiculous as it is, but I can’t seem to help myself. Who knows where this stuff comes from… I’ve yet to really dive deep into it.

The drive into Oceanside isn’t far, but the endless traffic makes it longer. When my car’s navigation tells me I’m five minutes away, my hands start to sweat.

Carla’s kids are seventeen. Colson and Cyrus. *Twins.*

Two teenage boys… *God, help me.* From what she's told me, they're a bit of a handful. At least one of them is. Which could be another reason I'm eager to help.

Boys that age need a father figure around. And yes, I know, I'm not their dad, and I never will be. But still, I kind of like the idea of being there for them. Giving them something I didn't have growing up.

I told you, I have issues.

Carla was young when she had the boys, though her husband was a few years older. Their divorce actually just went through last month, and while I have to assume they were happy in the beginning, all I get from her now is that her ex is a *giant piece of shit, a waste of a man*, and she just wants to *pretend he never existed*.

I can't imagine those things ever being said about me, especially by someone who used to love me.

Pulling into the driveway of the tiny house, I take a breath while looking it over. Four people living in such a small space? It doesn't seem fun. No wonder Carla likes to crash at my place every time we have a date.

Locking my Maserati, I harness my confidence, reminding myself to be polite and to make a good impression as I knock on the door. It swings open after only ten seconds, and I'm met with the amber eyes and platinum blonde hair of Carla Whittle-Becker.

"Hi." She smiles, refined and poised, as usual. She hasn't lost the air of wealth and superiority I'm guessing she learned from being rich for so many years, even with barely a hundred bucks to her name.

"Hello." I grin back, kissing her cheek. Glancing above her halo of blonde, I check for the boys. But I don't see them.

"Come in." She moves aside and gestures for me to come inside. But before I can take half a step, she says, "I'm sorry it's so small and dumpy. It should be temporary… Hopefully."

I make sure to keep a calming smile as my fingers brush her arm. "Don't be silly. It's nice."

She rolls her eyes. But we both drop it, making our way toward the kitchen, which is apparently where we'll be eating. I'm used to it. My aunt's house never had a dining room. But I guess to people with money, eating in the kitchen is considered ridiculous.

There are four place settings, which makes sense. Carla's sister isn't joining us, for obvious reasons.

“Boys! Dinner!” Carla shouts in a direction, then turns to me. “Wine?”

“Please.” My smile remains easy. Pleasant.

I can feel Carla’s tension, and I just wish she knew she doesn’t need to act this way around me. I feel like I’m interviewing her for a job. Which is strange, since *I’m* the one meeting her kids. I should be much more nervous than she is.

Carla brings plates to the counter and begins scooping food onto them while I look around. There are kitschy little decorations everywhere, but I can’t be certain if it has anything to do with Carla, since this isn’t her house.

For the roughly six weeks we’ve been seeing each other, I still don’t feel like I truly *know* Carla Becker. I know the version of herself she shows me. The version she wants me to know… to impress me.

But I’m not sure the Carla I know is even a real person.

Once I’ve killed my first glass of wine and the food is on the table, she finally relaxes, just a tad.

“I’m glad you’re here.” She sighs, fingers running up and down my abs over my button-down. “Though I wish we could have done this at your house.”

“I don’t mind coming to you,” I tell her, sincerely. Also, I felt like bringing her boys to my home for the first meeting might make them uncomfortable.

“Because you’re the sweetest.” She kisses my cheek. Then pulls back and shouts, louder this time, “Cyrus! Colson! Downstairs, now!”

She rolls her eyes, and I can’t help but chuckle. Footsteps clunk from somewhere in the near-distance, and she whispers, “Don’t let him intimidate you, please.”

“Who…?” I’m muttering as she steps away, and two black-haired boys saunter into the room.

They shuffle past me, not acknowledging my presence in the slightest as they each slump into a chair at the table, side by side. I’m trying hard not to openly assess them, but I just want to know what I’m dealing with here. I’ve only known one set of twins in my life, in high school, and we weren’t exactly friends.

Of course, they’re just people. But siblings who are the same age has always been an interesting concept to me. There’s no room for a younger-older dynamic. I grew up an only child desperate for a sibling. So the idea

of having one who looks just like me, shares the same birthday, same grade in school… It's beyond fascinating.

Stepping over to the table, I take my seat, noticing instantly that one of them has no desire to look at me, while the other is actively trying not to.

They're identical as identical could be, these boys. The only difference I can notice off the bat is that one of them keeps his hair shaggier, hanging in his eyes, and has his nails painted chipped-black. That's the one who's disregarding me.

The other one—the one who's eyes keep flitting up to me, then back down to the table—looks a bit less *emo*, just from the outside, anyway.

"Boys, this is Tauren," Carla says, her tone easy, though the tension around her eyes and mouth is noticeable. "Tauren, this is Cyrus, and Colson."

She gestures across the table to our right for Cyrus, and our left for Colson, and I make a very important mental note.

Cyrus and Colson. Colson is the emo one, Cyrus is the fidgety one. And they're both very quiet. Then again, it's only been two minutes.

Cyrus finally glances at me for real, keeping his green eyes locked on mine as he smiles. "Nice to meet you."

Polite. That's good.

Peeking at Colson, I raise a brow. He looks up from where he's carving into the wood of the table with his fork and scoffs. Then looks back down.

Okay…

"It's very nice to meet both of you." I go for polite and charming. Cyrus seems inviting of it, but his twin… not so much. "I've heard a lot about you. Your mom talks about you all the time."

"Doubtful," Colson mutters, and Carla shoots him a look he appears entirely unaffected by.

"We've heard about you too," Cyrus cuts in. "I love your app, by the way. I use it all the time…"

He's wearing an emphatic grin, although his eye contact still keeps bouncing away from mine. He's obviously the shy one, which I have to appreciate. I was the same way at his age.

The smart, quiet loner.

"That's awesome to hear," I reply, and his unsteady gaze flings back up. "You're on the younger end of the demographic."

He huffs a small chuckle, and I can't help but notice how good it feels to get at least one of them on my side.

But then, there's the other…

"Oh, yea. I'm sure Mom's *really* excited about how well your app's been doing," Colson grumbles. I glance at him. "She wouldn't date anyone who isn't worth at least a few mill."

"Ignore him." Carla shakes her head. "He's pretty much the most annoying person on Earth."

Colson rolls his eyes while Cyrus fidgets some more.

Going for humor, I say, "That can't be accurate," then wink at Colson.

They both gape at me for a moment before Cyrus chuckles again. I think I catch a flicker of a grin on Colson's mouth too, but he smothers it before it can become anything real.

"Well, everyone dig in." Carla sighs. "I hope you like Italian."

"I do." I grin, picking up my fork. She already knows that, though, because we've had this conversation before.

Italian is the only food we both like. *One of those very few similarities.*

"It's from DaVoli's," Colson says pointedly. "She doesn't cook. Did she tell you that?"

"Colson. Enough." Carla shakes her head sternly, a tired irritation in her voice that I'm picking up as reserved specifically for him.

But he keeps going, ignoring her scolding. "We used to have personal chefs. What's an entitled mother to do when they vanish, along with all the convict husband's money?"

"Col…" Cyrus whispers, giving his brother the side-eye in between awkwardly watching me. I think he wants to make a good impression as much as his mother does.

Okay, here's the thing… I'm not stupid.

I know Carla needs money, and she doesn't exactly have the skills necessary to get it on her own. Her ex was wealthy long before he became an investor. Old money, for generations before him, not much of it probably obtained legally. But that didn't matter to his young bride.

Carla and I met through mutual friends, at a benefit where every man in attendance would have been an eligible second husband. And she wasn't the only woman there with dollar signs in her eyes. It's just a part of being a young, attractive, and newly wealthy bachelor here in this lovely, if not overly shallow place we call So-Cal.

Carla met me when she was searching for a new provider for herself and her boys. And like I said before, I'm not opposed to it.

Truth be told, I never saw myself embarking on a *traditional* romance. I've always thought about having kids, maybe in more of an abstract sense, but not necessarily babies of my own. Finding a wife who already has children seemed like something I could make work.

The skeletons in my closet aren't complete corpses like the ones in Dustin's, but if you went digging, you might find a femur or two. Which is why I think this arrangement could be beneficial to all of us.

So here we are.

Taking a bite of the chicken parmesan, I observe the boys across the table. They're in need of some guidance, that much is clear. Carla told me that Dustin was never a great father; not very affectionate or involved. Who knows how much of what she's told me is true, but either way, I have every intention of getting to the root of what makes these boys tick. For no other reason than to check this off my endless list of curiosities and sate my need to be the hero.

I'm here, in whatever way these three need me because, I mean… what's the alternative? Attempting to fall in love with a woman, no strings attached? That sounds too… uncomplicated.

It's been quiet for far too long at this table, and I choose to break through the awkward silence with a joke.

"So, do you two ever secretly switch girlfriends?" I ask the twins, teasing as my lips curl at my own sense of humor.

But I realize quickly that I might have fucked up, since Cyrus's face pales like he's seen a ghost. His eyes go round as he gawks at me from across the table, before the whiteness in his cheeks is replaced by a deep pink.

"I'm sorry…" I rub the back of my neck. "Bad joke."

Colson lets out a cackle. When I glance at Carla, she's shaking her head admonishingly. But I can't help the grin tugging at my mouth from getting the surly one to laugh. Cyrus still looks mortified, poking at his chicken with his fork while he works his lower lips between his teeth. I think it's kind of cute.

"What a dumbass," Colson snorts at my expense, and Carla drops her head. But he just smirks at me. "Maybe he can stay."

I know I should be offended that he's calling me a *dumbass*, but there's something so satisfying about making him smile… About their acceptance. I guess it's because they're my girlfriend's kids, but it feels more special than that.

Who knows. It's not like I've ever met a girlfriend's kids before, so I'm pretty inexperienced… with all of this.

After my attempt at breaking the ice, we continue digging into our food. Well, *I* do. And the boys do. Carla is sort of just picking at some salad on the side of her lasagna, which doesn't surprise me since she barely eats, practicing that bizarre female thing where they make it seem like they don't consume food. As if *doing so* somehow makes you unattractive. I don't get it, but I've definitely seen it before. I've been on dates where a woman will order a salad and nibble casually at it like a rabbit. It makes no sense to me.

Human beings *eat*. I love to eat, therefore I'd like to find a partner who loves to eat, too.

But I'm also not trying to be picky here. Carla's probably just nervous, and I've been reminding myself not to nitpick the things she does that constantly remind me how incompatible we are. I'd rather focus on the positive for now.

"Um, so Tauren…" A voice brings me out of my thoughts, and I glance up at the identical sets of green eyes and black hair to find the one speaking to me. It's Cyrus. "I read online that you attended a fundraiser held by Bezos recently. Does that mean Knight-Life will be partnering with like… Kindle or something?"

I have to bite back my massive smile. The kid is smart as a whip and clearly enthusiastic about my business. It makes me all warm and fuzzy in the chest.

"Great," Colson mumbles under his breath. "Just what the world needs, more rich pricks getting richer."

Cyrus shoots his brother a look before his eyes drop to his lap and I witness him swallowing hard. I don't want him to be discouraged. I barely know them, but I think I'm picking up on the dynamic here. Cyrus is the smart, dorky one.

And Colson is the anarchist.

"You're quite perceptive in business, aren't you, Cyrus?" I ask him, my tone reassuring.

His eyes bounce back up to mine and the corner of his mouth twists, before of course he clears his throat and drops his gaze once more, preserving that timid façade.

“No business talk at dinner,” Carla jumps in. “Boys, eat.”

The tension is palpable at this table, but it’s nothing I can’t handle. I’m just so intrigued by these boys already. Sure, we just met, but they seem absolutely nothing like Carla, which is secretly a relief, though I’m not sure why.

To be honest, when I found out Carla had kids, I was damn near shocked. She just doesn’t *seem* like the motherly type at all. I have no evidence to support this hunch, but I can almost guarantee these boys were raised by nannies and au pairs more than Carla and Dustin themselves.

The meal goes on from there, quiet and a little awkward, which is to be expected. I ask the boys about school, and in a reveal that surprises absolutely no one, Cyrus loves school and Colson does not.

While Cy is obviously the shy one, he does seem to enjoy talking to *me*, which is cool. The only problem is that when he does, I can sense the resentment oozing from his brother like a noxious pheromone. Colson is practically seething, and I can’t tell if it’s because he’s jealous or overprotective. Or maybe both.

In an attempt to involve him in the conversation, I ask, “So, Colson, if you don’t like school, then what do you like?”

His eyes bulge momentarily at the fact that I’m actually asking something about *him*. The flash of vulnerability at simply being asked what he likes is enough to weight me to my chair.

His sea glass gaze softens as his lips part. But before he can’t speak, Carla scoffs. “Oh you know, the usual screwing around and wasting everyone’s time.”

Colson’s eyes immediately harden once more, a glower narrowing in his mother’s direction. It’s not a pleasant look, and when I peek at Cyrus, he’s shrinking into himself, the discomfort clear in his hunched shoulders.

Colson shoots flames at Carla for only another moment before he turns back to me. “Sorry, Tauren. I’m not good enough to participate in this conversation. It’s okay, though. You have Cyrus, so I might as well take off.” He scoots his chair out forcefully, making a loud scrape against the floor. Then growls at Carla, “You should’ve had a girl, so she could follow in your gold-digging slut footsteps.”

Carla gasps in outrage, but Colson is already up and storming out of the room. “You’re so grounded, you little shit!” she shouts after him, her voice screeching. “Good luck knocking up the neighborhood girls now!”

The last thing I catch from Colson are the clunks of his boots and a black nail polished middle finger in our direction before he disappears up the stairs and out of sight.

I peer at Carla, wanting to tell her that was totally out of line, but also knowing full-well it’s not my place. Still, it hurts me to choke it down.

Sure, Colson isn’t a superstar student like Cyrus, but that shouldn’t invalidate him as a person. I don’t know shit about raising kids, but I’d like to think I’d never treat them like *that*.

“Mom… Jesus,” Cyrus mutters quietly, shaking his head as he scoots out his own chair, wasting no time dashing after his brother.

“Oh yea. *I’m* the bad guy,” Carla huffs, tossing back her glass of wine. She lets out a strong sigh. “Welcome to my life.”

I’m baffled silent. All the things I’d like to say won’t help in this situation, so instead I just take her hand on top of the table. She gives me an appreciative look, as if she’s grateful to me for being here, and siding with her.

Little does she know, I’m really not. I’m considering how badly these kids need *some*one else around. A parent who actually gives a shit.



IT’S BEEN a month since my first dinner with Carla’s kids. I left her house that night with my thoughts swimming.

Before I met Cyrus and Colson, dating Carla was just something to keep me busy. I knew she wanted it to get more serious, but I was on the fence, being that I could easily see through her intentions. I still can…

But now, the stakes have been raised. I think I could serve an actual purpose if I stay with Carla. I think I could help those boys.

They could be my purpose.

Today I’m bringing them to the Santa Monica Pier. Just the three of us.

Carla was wary when I told her I wanted to spend time with the boys, without her. But I insisted that I have it under control. I mean, I'm not exactly well-versed in dealing with teenage boys. But I *was* one. Sure, it was a couple of decades ago, but I still vaguely remember how I felt during that time.

More importantly, I just want to bond with them. I want them to know that I'm here to stay, because isn't that always the issue with kids from broken homes? When one parent starts to date again, the children are hesitant to get close for fear of even further abandonment.

I want to make sure they know that isn't me. Tauren Vance isn't intimidated by a challenge, nor does he shy from the opportunity to play the hero.

It's a quirk I've had for a long time. *Don't judge me.*

The three of us file out of my Maserati and wander toward the pier. It's a beautiful day to be outside, so there's no shortage of people here right now. Still, it's really nice, and as we grow closer, the smell of delicious food brushes my face on the tail of ocean breeze. Laughter and cheers spread around us. I peek at the boys.

Cyrus looks excited. His eyes are wide, and his chin is bobbing all around as he takes in the scenery. Colson, on the other hand, seems mopey. But I'm gathering that it's sort of standard behavior for him.

I've seen the boys here and there over the past month. We've had dinner a couple more times, and when I come to pick Carla up for dates, I always make it a point to talk to them as much as I can.

Cyrus is easy. He seems just like me at that age, and even though he's shy, once I get him onto a topic he's passionate about, the kid can yap my ear off.

Colson is a little trickier. I still haven't figured out how to connect with him.

Cyrus told me his brother is a very talented guitarist, and even better at vocals. When I found that out, it all made a little more sense. Colson clearly has an artist brain. He's not interested in math or science like Cy and me. It'll make it harder for me to relate to him, but still, I'm going to try.

Hell, I like music after all.

Speaking of, as we walk onto the pier, there's a guy sitting off to the side playing an acoustic guitar. I recognize the song he's strumming right away and nudge Colson with my elbow.

“Pink Floyd. Nice.” I peer at him, and he twists his face in my direction. The boys are actually pretty tall. They’re about my height—six feet—so he’s able to lock our eyes over less than an inch of difference.

“Yea… Sweet,” Colson mutters, then rolls his eyes.

“You like to play stuff like that?” I keep pushing.

Instead of answering me, he scoffs and shakes his head, then wanders away.

Alright, then.…

“He likes punk and emo more than classic rock,” Cyrus tells me, and my gaze leaves the sullen twin, moving to the more pleasant one.

I give him a kind smile. “You want a churro?”

He grins back. “Hell yea.”

The two of us follow after Colson, who’s walking down the pier, barely sparing a glance for all the games, colorful prizes, and food stands. He looks like he’s walking directly for the Ferris wheel, and part of me wants to catch up to him, maybe ask if he’d like to go on it. But the other part of me, the smarter part, knows it would just leave me open to more of his scoffing and eye-rolling.

So instead, I let him go. Because he’s seventeen, which is almost an adult, meaning he can obviously take care of himself. If he wants to spend time with us, I’m sure he’ll come back.

I grab two churros for Cyrus and me, and we eat them while walking around, checking out all the cool stuff. We launch easily into conversation about a paper he’d been writing on Napoleon for an AP history class. And once we’re done with our treats, we’re at the base of the Ferris wheel.

My eyes fling around, discreetly searching for Colson, to make sure he didn’t completely take off. I spot him by the gate, watching the tall ride.

“So… emo and punk, huh?” I ask Cyrus, eyes set on his twin.

“Yea,” Cyrus mumbles, and when I peek at him, he’s watching Colson, too. “I’ve never been into it… The whining and screaming.” He chuckles and I grin. “But when Col plays it… I don’t know, it sounds better. He makes me like things I shouldn’t…” His voice trails and he clears his throat. “I mean, *wouldn’t*. Like, normally…”

Eyeing Cyrus for a moment, my gaze then leaves for Colson. Even though they look exactly the same, I’m beginning to notice the little differences in their appearances. It’s as if they wear their personalities on the outside, to let everyone know how *different* they are.

It’s fascinating. They both are, in their own ways.

My chest grows tight, and I clear my throat.

“So… I’m sure you’ve figured out that your mom and I are getting serious…” I speak as steadily as I can, though for unknown reasons, my heart is jumping way too fast.

I’m barely even sure of what I’m doing, but the words just started pushing their way out of my lips.

Cyrus stills. I can almost feel it. Eventually, after a thick moment, his head tilts in my direction.

“Well, I’m… I’ve been thinking…” I go on, though this is much harder to get out than I anticipated. Then again, I haven’t put all that much thought into this. But regardless, I take a breath and force myself to keep riding this crazy train. “I’m going to ask her to marry me. And I just want to make sure it’s okay with you. And your brother.”

Cyrus’s eyes are practically bulging out of his skull. He stares at me for a solid thirty seconds before he even blinks. And still, he says nothing.

The tension is swallowing us whole. All sorts of things I never let myself think about come floating up to the forefront of my mind.

Truth be told, I didn’t bring them here for this. When I got up this morning, I had no real intention of marrying Carla Whittle-Becker. Hell, it wasn’t my plan to even bring it up until literally ten seconds ago. But something about these boys is calling to me…

And their mother too, of course.

“What’s going on over here?” Colson stomps up to us, his gaze narrowing at his brother’s state of shock before zoning in on me.

“He wants to m-marry…” Cyrus’s voice comes out gravelly. “Mom. He wants to marry Mom…”

Colson freezes for a moment, before he bursts into a fit of laughter. But it cuts short, and he glares at his brother, hard. His green eyes, framed by dark lashes stay on Cyrus for many weighted seconds.

Then he finally rolls them, a move I definitely expected, and scoffs at me. “Your funeral, I guess.”

Their reactions aren’t what I expected. Granted, I’m not really sure *what* I expected, being that I hadn’t given this much actual thought before just now. But still, they don’t seem *happy* at the idea of having me as a stepdad.

And now I’m questioning everything.

What am I even doing??

Maybe I can't help them. Maybe I'm just inserting myself somewhere that I don't belong.

Do I really want this ready-made family?? Can I even help these boys, or will I just turn into another disappointment?

"I… I just want to let you two know I'm not going anywhere," I tell them with sincerity. They're both just *staring* at me with those gemstone eyes. It's overwhelming.

"You're not our *father*, Tauren," Colson mutters, then he peeks at Cyrus and whispers, "He's not."

"I know that." I nod. "I don't want to be your father. I just want to be your friend. And I want to… help you. Your mom, yes, but also you two. Is that cool?"

The two of them are quiet for what feels like an eternity. They share a look I can't read, though it appears to be some sort of telepathic twin conversation, which fascinates me down to my marrow as much as it gives me heartburn.

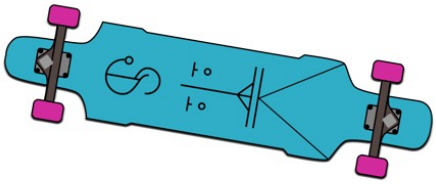
Cyrus looks at me first. And he nods, granting me a small, uneasy smile. I glance at Colson next.

And he rolls his eyes once again. "This oughta be interesting."

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7

CYRUS



"Do we have to do this?" Colson's petulant yet somehow still growly tone buzzes around my head. But I can't be concerned with what's making him angry this time.

I'm too busy worrying.

Things are changing again. Too much and too drastic, just like last time. The only difference, though, is that these are good changes. *Theoretically…*

"Colson, for God's sake, stop bitching and get in the car," Mom says, though her attention is stuck on the screen of her phone, as usual. "You too, Cy. Let's get a move on. Jill's waiting. We were supposed to be there fifteen minutes ago."

"I'm already walking to the car," I mumble.

"Colson, vamonos." The deep voice straightens my spine. Chills brush my exposed skin as Tauren saunters out of the house, then pauses to address my mother. "We taking your car?"

"Yea, but you're driving," she says, glancing up from her phone for only a second.

"That's a guarantee, soon-to-be-misses." He grins at her.

He takes her keys and no matter how badly I want to, I can't pry my eyes away from them as he smiles and kisses her forehead.

I feel nauseous all of a sudden.

"I just don't understand why we all have to go look at a house." Colson continues to complain, standing up on the front steps of our interim home,

which is Tauren's house in Carlsbad. "It's not like my opinion matters, anyway."

"Don't be silly. Of course it does," Tauren grunts, opening the passenger door of the Mercedes SUV he bought for my mother... *Two months* into their relationship. *Yea*. "This is our first house as a family. Everyone needs to love it. Right, Cy?"

My gaze darts up to his at mention of my name. My mother slinks into the vehicle and he closes the door behind her, shooting a wink at me.

He does that a lot. I know it's friendly. Obviously, it is…

The problem is that he's already the most gorgeous man I've ever laid eyes on, and when he does those little charming things, it's really tough to not pretend it's flirtatious.

I know, I know. I'm a fucking masochist.

First my brother, now my soon-to-be stepdad. I must have some serious issues.

I nod slowly, unable to even recall what he just asked me. I'm too busy drowning in the deep ocean blue pools of his eyes. Tumbling down the slope of his upper lip and landing on the bottom one like a big pink pillow made of candy.

A throat clears, loud, snapping me out of my trance. Peeking left, I find my brother glaring at me. I swallow and look away, awkwardly scuttling into the backseat of the vehicle. Colson finally concedes with a stubborn huff, climbing into the car next to me. There's a whole empty seat between us, but I can still feel him. I'm sure I could even if it was concrete separating us.

Tauren jumps into the driver's seat and starts up the vehicle, buckling his seatbelt. "Alright! Solana Beach, here we come!"

Mom continues typing on her phone. Colson rolls his eyes. And I admire the strong, tanned forearms of the driver as he steers us out of his driveway.

I know it makes me sound like a creeper, but staring at Tauren seems to be the only thing calming down my anxiety right now.

We're on our way to look at a house in Solana Beach, which, yes, is where we lived before the criminal got us kicked out. It was a massive scandal when it happened, so the idea of moving back, going back to Solana Beach Preparatory School, and facing all the kids who have been shit-

talking us on social media for a year… Let's just say I have mixed feelings about it.

Of course I'd much rather go back to Solana Prep than enroll in yet another school. But the new school year starts next week, and since we're currently living in Carlsbad, we have some stuff to figure out. Mainly where we'll be spending our senior year.

These stresses are exclusive to me, since my brother doesn't give a tiny rat's ass about graduating, or going to college. Tauren's been all over him lately, trying to get him to engage, and show some interest in his future. I wish I could tell the poor guy it's pointless.

If he could make a career out of it, Colson would become a professional beatnik.

But our mother's boyfriend doesn't find that to be a satisfactory path. And since he's the one who's financing our lives now, we kind of have to do what he says.

It's really not a bad thing, though. Tauren Vance just slid into our lives like it's that easy, riding in on his white horse—or in his case, a black Maserati—to save us from the hard-knock life we'd been living for barely a year.

We only knew Tauren for six weeks before he proposed to Mom and moved us out of Aunt Lily's, into his home in Carlsbad. Truth be told, I thought he was kidding. When he brought us to Santa Monica and said he wanted to propose to Mom, I was sure we'd never seen him again. After all, it's not like Carla Becker is a *prize*.

But then, much to Colson's and my surprise, two weeks later, they both came back from one of their dates announcing that she'd *said yes!*

Of course she did. *Was there another answer to the question that would get her back into the world of wealth she'd been cast out of by my father's crimes??*

That night, after Mom was done squealing about the ring, Tauren told us to get packed. His intentions were to move us into his house while they planned the wedding and searched for a new home for the four of us.

It all happened so fast; honestly, at first, I thought I was hallucinating. It just seemed so unlikely that our mother would snag a new rich guy that fast. And what's more, that he would be someone… like Tauren.

Tauren Vance is unlike any of the other snobby, rich jerks we grew up surrounded by. Guys like Dad and his friends… All they ever cared about

was proving how much bigger their money made them. Their lives were made up of country clubs, wining and dining other rich guys and seeing who could throw down their black cards first.

Truth be told, my father and his friends always reminded me of Patrick Bateman and his pals in *American Psycho*. And sure, my dad wasn't arrested for killing hookers, but if we're being totally honest… I can see it.

Tauren, on the other hand, cares more about his own success and hard work than the money it brings him. There's a difference between boasting about how well you're doing and just generally taking pride in your business, and Tauren really just seems to *love* what he does. And he put in the work too, based on what he's told me, and my own research.

My mother was dating someone from Forbes who looked like he belonged on GQ… Naturally, he caught the attention of my Google search bar.

Glancing up at the rearview mirror, I watch his face for a moment as he concentrates on the road. Until his cerulean eyes flit to mine and I begin to fidget.

Okay, I feel bad. Because Tauren is just a generally nice guy, and we get along well. But what he doesn't know, and I'm sure he'd run screaming if he did, is that I think I'm developing a little crush on the guy.

It's not intentional. Far from it. I wish like hell I didn't feel this way, but it's so hard not to…

He's *perfect.*

And sure enough, when my eyes slink left, I find an angry version of my own face glaring back at me.

Things with Colson have been the definition of messed up lately. Ever since the night of the festival, the night we tore down the last remaining protective barrier keeping us apart, every night following has ended with a question…

Are we brothers… Or something more?

And its answer is always a toss-up. I can't even count on my hands and feet how many times he shoved me into our shared bedroom at Aunt Lily's just to attack my mouth with his. Or how many times I just couldn't stand not dropping to my knees in front of him.

It's detrimentally wrong, and we both know that. We're deep in an addiction we can't break ourselves free from, no matter how awful it is. The craving is too strong.

When we moved out of Aunt Lily's, things changed a bit. In Tauren's house, we no longer share a bedroom. But that doesn't stop him from sneaking into my room when all the lights are out, just to push his way inside my mouth.

No words, no defenses. It just… keeps happening. I'm beginning to think there's no way to stop it. And even if there was a cure to this illness that plagues my body and mind, I'm not sure I'd take it.

Colson is the only person I can be myself with. I don't have the social skills to try and meet someone… I'm too much of a coward to even come out. But with my brother, I don't need to worry about that. He's *me*, only confident and aggressive. He's the me I'll probably never get to be.

I don't want to lose that.

The folksy music Tauren is playing through the stereo slips into my brain, weaving through my incessant over-thinking until next thing I know, the car is stopping.

"Here we are." Tauren sighs, then slaps my mother on the arm. "Phones away now."

She rolls her eyes at him, but does as he says, tucking her phone into her purse. We all hop out of the car, and my eyes are drawn to the monstrosity before us.

"This place is giant!" Mom squeals, grabbing Tauren by the arm and pulling him up the steps.

He chuckles, then turns over his shoulder. "Come on, boys."

Colson and I wander after them, and I can't help but sort of balk at how ginormous this place is on the outside. *Maybe it'll seem smaller on the inside?*

That idea flies right out one of the fifty-billion windows in this mansion the second we step inside.

"Holy crap…" My voice literally echoes.

"Is this Jay-Z's house?" Colson mutters, poking around the foyer. "I mean, really. Do we need to live in a Kardashian-size mansion? I just don't see how this is necessary."

I know Colson is being grouchy, but he has a point. Tauren's house in Carlsbad is more than enough space for the four of us. It's freaking huge, and actually really homey. Of course, Mom hates it. I don't think she's comfortable in a house unless you have to walk a quarter mile to find each other.

Colson disappears up the winding staircase while I putter around. I can hear Mom's realtor friend, Jill, explaining all kinds of things, bragging about top-of-the-line appliances, fixtures, moldings—all opulent vanity if you ask me.

I wish I could enjoy this just a little, but it's really hard. I'm so anxious about school, knowing I'll have to face the same assholes I never got along with before, now with even more ammunition against me.

Once I'm done checking out all the rooms downstairs, and admiring the view of the beach, which I must admit, is pretty cool, I climb the stairs to investigate the bedroom situation. It looks like there are two wings of rooms, and I make a right, my sneakers treading along the shiny hardwood floors as I go.

Peering inside one of the bedrooms, I notice that it has its own bathroom. After spending almost a year sharing one bathroom with three other people, I think it might be nice to have my own again. Moving onto the next room up the hall, I peek inside. This one also has an attached bathroom. I wander through the doorway to check it out, and next thing I know, someone is yanking me by the arm and shoving me into the wall.

"Hi, good twin," my brother mumbles, giving me no time to react before his softly insistent lips are coming for mine.

I want to be shocked, or try to resist, but how can I even attempt it when this feels like dousing my entire body in euphoria and lighting a match?

My hands fly to Colson's waist while he sucks and bites impatiently all over my mouth, tongue sliding between my lips to punish mine. My fingers slink up inside his shirt and he growls.

"We should close the door," I whisper, fighting the shake in my voice. It's my nerves. They're always present, but now even more, what with the risk of our mother, Tauren, and a random woman stumbling upon us any minute.

"I think it's hotter this way," Colson rumbles, holding me still by my jaw while he lashes my tongue with his, biting my lower lip hard enough that I flinch. My cock is aching between us. I'm arching up to him as he pulls back, teasing me, brushing his lips over mine while he pins me against the wall with his hips. "Unless you're afraid your *crush* might see."

My lashes flutter at him, and he cocks his head, freezing me with a knowing glare. I swallow hard, trying to placate him by running my fingers

down to the waist of his pants. His jaw tightens and I let out an unsteady breath.

“What’s your point, Col?” My index finger traces the line of hair disappearing into his boxers.

“Funny, I thought I was being perfectly clear,” he says calmly. I gape up at him, giving him my widest puppy-dog eyes I know he can’t stay mad at. He rolls his eyes. “You’re obsessed with him, Cyrus. It’s so fucking obvious.”

“I’m not *obsessed* with him…”

“And he’s up your ass constantly, too.”

I can’t even help the frisson of arousal that rushes through me at his choice of words. I bite my lip while my face heats up like a goddamn oven, and Colson narrows his gaze at me. One of his hands glides down my chest and stomach, covering my erection over my jeans. A whimper leaves my lips as he locks me in place with jade eyes.

“Is this for me… or for him?” He breathes over my mouth, like cinnamon candy and secrets. My legs turn to jelly.

“F-for you.” I push my hips forward. He squeezes my cock and I groan quietly, head tapping the wall behind me.

“Are you sure?” His hot mouth trails my jaw, dropping kisses down my throat, his tongue peeking out to taste my skin and drive me fucking crazy with need.

I nod frantically. “Yes. Only you.”

He hums, his hands working to open my pants. “I’m doing this for you, good twin. Do you understand?”

I’m not really sure what he’s talking about, but I nod anyway, shivering from the feel of him sucking my pulse and grinding me into the wall. “Yes, I understand.”

And then something truly insane happens. He falls to his knees.

My eyes shoot open, and I gawk down at him while he pulls my cock out of my pants, stroking it a few times in his hand.

“I want to give you something he never will,” he mumbles quietly. And I see the first flash of uncertainty in his eyes while he licks his lips.

“We shouldn’t…” I croak. “They could come up here any minute.”

His eyes flit up to mine. “Then I guess I’ll have to be quick, hm?”

My dick pulses and leaks precum in front of his face. And he watches it in fascination.

“Have you ever…” My voice trails in humility. “Have you done it before?”

He shakes his head. “No.”

I’m fucking *flying*. I feel weightless, even though I shouldn’t. I should be worried about people catching us, but I can’t be. I’m too busy focusing on the fact that my straight twin brother is going to suck a dick for the first time. *Mine*.

Colson glances back up at me. “Keep your eyes on me.”

I nod slowly, and then he parts his lips. It’s like agony in the two seconds it takes him to move them around my cock. A deliciously aching build. And once I’m in his mouth, my entire body tremors.

“*Fuuuck*…” I sigh, gripping the wall behind me so I don’t fall down while he sucks me in deeper, using his tongue to wet my erection all over.

I’m dying. I think I might be having a literal heart attack.

But I’m praying to God that I’m not because this is my first time getting head. I could be bleeding profusely and I wouldn’t stop this.

Colson’s mouth is the warmest, softest thing my dick has ever been inside. The feeling is divine; heavenly. I don’t care how evil what we’re doing truly is. There’s no way something that feels this incredible could be *wrong*.

He lets out a huff when the tip of my dick touches the back of his throat. My limbs are trembling as I reach forward to hold his face, my thumbs drawing cherishing circles on his cheekbones. His eyes meet mine and we watch each other, staring as he sucks me back and swallows.

“God… Col…” I whine, keeping as quiet as possible.

His hands grip my hips hard, digging his fingers into me while he sucks up and down my solid flesh, black head of hair bobbing in front of me like a salacious dream. I can’t believe this is happening. I would fall down and weep if I didn’t think it’d make him stop.

Suddenly, there’s a noise. I’m surprised I heard it over my heart clanging in my ears, but I did.

It sounds like… Footsteps. And voices.

Fear jolts in my muscles as I whisper, “Col… I think someone’s coming.”

“Mmm…” he mumbles on my dick, still sucking. Not stopping, even a little.

My eyelids fall shut for a moment, and I suck my bottom lip into my mouth. But a sting brings my attention back to him. He pulls off my dick, breathing heavily. “I said eyes on me.”

“Mhm.” My hum comes out scratchy. He goes back to licking and slurping on my firm flesh, my balls humming with pleasure. Until I hear the noise again. It really sounds like someone is coming. “Colson…”

He keeps staring up at me, eyes shimmering, lips stretched to swallow me up. My hips flick with his rampant sucking while my ears remain open for any signal that people are growing closer. Which they definitely are.

From the sound of their voices and the clunking of their steps, I can tell they’re upstairs. But they’re in the other wing; the left side.

“W-we should stop…” I whisper-groan at my brother, who’s going to town on my cock like he’s trying to suck out a prize. His slippery wet mouth is pumping and pumping, and even though I know I should pull away from him, I just *can’t*.

I think I would rather risk the consequences of whatever will happen when they find us than stop this other-worldly pleasure.

My dick slides into the back of Colson’s throat again, and this time he relaxes enough to take it deeper.

“Fuck me fuck me fuck me…” I’m sweating and my head is spinning. I feel the build in my nuts unlike anything I’ve experienced before.

I’m so fucking close.

Colson swallows on my dick, his throat tightening as he does.

The footsteps are coming closer. They’re coming this way.

My eyes plead with him for something, I’m not sure what. But he just keeps gazing up at me. And I can hear what he’s thinking. What he’s commanding.

Come for me, Cyrus. Come in my mouth before they catch us.

My fingers slide back into his hair, and I grip it hard. “I’m close… I’m gonna…”

He works my dick faster, fucking me with his warm, sweet, wicked fucking mouth while my mother and Tauren and the lady walk into the bedroom next door.

“Fuck, I’m gonna… come,” I purr a hoarse whisper to him.

And he sucks it right out of me.

Slapping my hand over my mouth, I hold in my cries as best I can, my dick throbbing cum to fill up my twin brother’s mouth. He swallows it,

watching me the whole time, except for a brief moment when his lashes flutter and he looks just as high as me.

Just as enslaved as I am.

By the time he's pulling his mouth off me and standing up, Mom and Tauren are right outside the door. I'm shaking and sweating as I stuff myself back into my pants, zipping them just in time.

"Hey." Tauren smiles at us while they peer into the room. "You guys deciding who gets which room?"

"He can have this one," Colson mumbles, shooting me a look as his tongue swipes his lower lip.

I can't move or speak. I'm molded to the wall behind me, just trying to look normal, even though I'm positive everyone can tell I just had an orgasm.

My eyes dart around the room while they step inside, checking the place out.

"Wait," Tauren grunts, his voice firm and serious. Panic flutters in my belly. "Are you saying you guys like the house?"

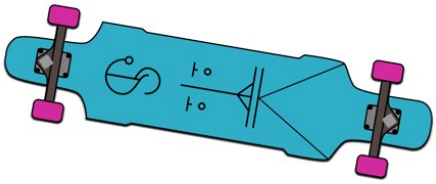
His eyes are all bright with excitement. All I can do is nod dizzily.

Colson brushes past them out of the room and says to the realtor, "We'll take it."

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8

CYRUS



American Lit isn’t doing much to hold my attention this morning.

Don’t get me wrong, I love to read. And I’ve enjoyed many of the books, and plays, we’ve discussed over the years in high school. *The Glass Menagerie* was much more interesting than I thought it’d be. But my favorites were *Lord of the Flies* and *The Great Gatsby*, though the latter was a bit scattered for my liking.

Don’t get me started on *Catcher in the Rye*. *Talk about an obnoxious protagonist…*

Right now, we’re on *The Scarlett Letter*, and I’m finding it hard to focus. Not only am I purposely choosing not to relate the hardships Hester Prynne faced with my own internal struggles, but the subject matter clearly isn’t titillating enough to captivate a couple of my nearest classmates.

Gentry Tourneau is sitting in the back row with his on-and-off girlfriend, Holly Lang. For some reason, Ms. Yen doesn’t seem to mind that they’re chatting and giggling, right the hell next to me, making it impossible for me to concentrate.

Okay… So I haven’t been concentrating all that well since our return to Solana Prep. But it’s only been a couple of weeks, and that’s not the point. School is my safe place. It’s the place where I get to hone the only thing that makes me *me*. Where I can associate the pressures of life with tangible things.

Not like at home where I can barely figure out who I am.

Sure, in school, I'm also Colson's twin brother, but at least that keeps asshole jocks off my back, for the most part. We've gotten a few remarks since we've been back, but it's nothing I can't handle. And thankfully, the fear Colson has earned for years before we left seems to have transferred over. Honestly, I think even most of the faculty are afraid of him at this point, though not enough to keep them from giving him detention again, and again… And again.

Just like old times. It's almost as if nothing even changed in the last year.

We're back in Solana Beach, living in another giant McMansion five minutes from where we grew up. Tauren bought Colson and me a car to share, although he ends up using it more than I do, because he's Colson.

My ride to UCLA is fully planned out. I'm going to major in Biochemistry, get my doctorate, and hopefully someday make medication that will help people. I know how important it is, after all.

And even though on the outside things seem to have fallen right back into place, just beneath the surface, I'm flailing. I'm stuffed with secrets, to the point of bursting, and it's not good. I need to be able to focus on school, not the disparaging state of my personal life.

And definitely not the obviously entertaining things Gentry is doing to Holly three feet from where I'm sitting.

Holly giggles next to me and I cringe. I don't know why I'm being so grumpy. It's senior year. Most of us know what we're doing at this point. We know we'll be graduating soon, so why not feel each other up while our classmates share their half-hearted thoughts on *The Scarlet Letter*?

My eyes shift right, to where Gentry's hand is sinking tauntingly between Holly's thighs. I swallow hard.

Maybe I'm just jealous.

For most of my fellow students, hooking up is a second language, one they seem to speak fluently. It comes to them as easily as breathing. I see it all day every day. Guys making out with girls in the halls, or in the bathrooms. Behind the bleachers, in the parking lot.

Sex is *everywhere*. And it just makes me hate myself all the more.

Because the only sex—or sexual *activity*—I've had isn't something I could brag about… Or even mention out loud. I'd get arrested.

Paint a scarlet I *on my chest.*…

Blinking hard, I rub my eyes and try to focus on what Ms. Yen is saying. But I can't. I can't stop watching Gentry's hand in my peripheral. It's skating up and down Holly's thigh and it gives me a small tingle in the pit of my stomach, like a little electric butterfly zipping around in there.

His hand is big…

I shift in my seat.

I'm gay as fuck. There's no denying it anymore. Not that I've ever necessarily tried to hide it. But then again, I'm not opening up to anyone either.

I think my friends think I'm asexual. They're nerds anyway, so we don't talk about sex much. But they've been mentioning the girls they want to ask to prom, and the conversation does what it always does… What it's done since I was fifteen and realized there was no hope of me ever being attracted to girls…

It clams me up.

Thing is, there are a few gay guys here at Solana Prep. I'm sure it would be easy enough to talk to one of them about my sexual preferences; at the very least to have that moment I've been craving. That *awakening* that can only come from uttering those two words, out loud.

I'm gay.

I'm kind of desperate to come out… But at the same time, it terrifies me.

Those gay kids I know… They scare the shit out of me. We have nothing in common, shy of a need for another dick in our relationships. They run around, loud and proud of who they are, while I spend my days hiding.

My entire life is spent pretending to be something else. Someone *good*.

Turns out, my father fucked me up more than I ever truly realized. They both did. Mom and Dad have never seen me as anything more than a robot child. *Well, guess what, guys?? I have feelings, too!*

Just like everyone else, I want to overcome my hang-ups and be *me*. But *me* is also sort of unhinged.

I wouldn't have the faintest clue how to come out, anyway. There's only one person I know I can confide in… But confiding in him isn't something that will *help* me.

So yea… I'm definitely jealous. Jealous of everyone else being a million times more confident than me. Jealous of other people knowing

who they are, and having no qualms with showing it to the world.

Jealous of people having *normal* feelings toward the proper parties…

My feelings aren't normal. And the people I feel them for are *not* proper.

I'm relieved as hell when Lit ends and I have a study period. I have some reading I'd like to catch up on before chem lab, and I can do so by myself in the library. It's pretty much my favorite way to relax.

Heading to the back of the library, to the best quiet corner with the big leather chairs, I notice that I'm not the only one who had this idea.

Huddled on the floor at the far side of the room is my twin brother, and his little groupies. Yes, Colson has already fallen back in with his annoying friends from before we moved to Oceanside. Charlie, Jax, Keri, Isla, and my brother's *girlfriend*, Annabelle.

They follow him everywhere, especially Annabelle. She's been obsessively stalking Colson's life since before we left Solana Beach, but now that he's back, I guess he's giving her the time of day. On occasion.

Not that I care. It's… different.

And this doesn't matter.

Charlie and Jax are the other members of Colson's band, Fuck Your Face.

I'm not kidding. That's literally their name.

They're not serious—*clearly*. It's just something they started doing freshman year to piss their parents off. Which kind of sucks, because Colson is an immensely talented guitarist, and an even better vocalist. He should be practicing and figuring out how to make something of it, rather than getting stoned and performing songs like, *Your Mom Blew Me Last Night (While Your Dad Watched)*, on the beach.

Choosing not to acknowledge them, or let them ruin my free time, I drop my backpack on the floor and plop into one of the big chairs, nestling in and pulling up the Knight-Life app on my phone.

Of course I use it. It's awesome.

Knight-Life is the application Tauren's startup created. It's an interactive reading app that allows you to borrow books on your phone or tablet the way you would from a library. But it also synchs your playlists, learns your reading habits, suggests books and products based on an intricate algorithm.

It's pretty amazing. And it's turned Tauren Vance into a very wealthy man.

A tight warmth creeps up my chest at the mention of Tauren in my brain, and I pull my lower lip between my teeth.

He's my *mom's fiancé*…

Sigh.

Tapping the screen to resume the book I've been reading—*The Poison Squad*, which is actually pretty interesting—I pop in my earbuds, the playlist created for my reading pleasure queuing up right away. Unfortunately, the volume is low, and I can still hear the raucous laughter of my brother and his friends, fucking around a few feet away.

Determined to ignore them, I turn it up and keep reading. But I *feel* eyes on me. Familiar ones. The ones I feel all over my body even when he's nowhere to be seen.

My muscles stiffen the way they tend to, but I try my hardest to ignore it.

He can stare at me all he wants. I'm not looking over there.

I'm so invested in my denial, eyes locked almost painfully on the screen, that I flinch when something hits me out of nowhere. Glancing at the floor, I find the balled-up piece of notebook paper that just bounced off of my head. I peer in the direction I know it came from, my brother chuckling wickedly while his stupid friends laugh along.

His glassy green eyes lock on mine, and they sparkle. He's obviously high. He usually is since we moved back and he started hanging out with his *crew* again. Still, the way his lips curl, gaze slightly narrowed… He's taunting me. Daring me to do something, anything.

And I won't. Because that's always what Colson craves most. A reaction.

I refuse to give it to him. At least… not here at school.

Rolling my eyes at him, I go back to my book, resting my head on the back of the chair. I'm struggling to grasp any of the words I've been reading over and over. I'm too distracted.

I can't even function when he's nearby. I wish he'd just go outside, smoke his cigarettes and make out with his *girlfriend*. Leave the library—*my* territory—to me.

Another paper ball hits me on the forehead, and I close my eyes tight, letting out a breath.

This is what he wants. Don't react. Don't do it.

Suddenly, something new is hitting me. Small items… At first, I think it's candy. But as I pick up an orange pill from my shirt, I realize it's Adderall.

They're throwing fucking Adderall at me.

That's it.

Jumping up from my seat, I pause my music while stomping over to where they're all falling onto their sides laughing. Well, all of them except for Col. He's chuckling, but mainly just watching me, eyes dark. The way he always looks when he's fucking with me.

"Really?" I bark at them quietly, peeking left and right quickly to make sure no one's paying attention. "Adderall?"

"You're like the spokesperson for Adderall," Charlie snorts.

"I don't need pills to make my brain work," I huff. "I know that's a foreign concept to you."

"Whatever, genius boy," Jax grumbles, picking up a pill off the floor and popping it into his mouth.

My brow furrows at him like he's insane.

"We're just playing around, good twin," my brother mumbles, smirking up at me. His tone seems casual enough, but I know better. "You remember what *fun* is, don't you?"

He has this innocent lilt to his lips, the cock of his head making him seem like a curious animal. It's all for show. I know that, because I know him; like another part of me. A part I can't control.

Nothing about Colson is innocent, and his mischief is one of his most dangerous qualities.

Though I suppose that could be said for both of us.

Let's play.… His voice rings in my mind, a memory of him sneaking into my room a few nights ago. My brain sinks so easily into replaying the dirty slideshow, but I refuse to think about it right now, especially with him staring at me, reading my goddamn mind.

My throat dips and I shake my head, scolding him with a glare before turning and storming back to my chair. I'm not playing this game anymore.

Grabbing my stuff, I hightail it out of the library, leaving my brother alone to play that part he loves so much…

The bad twin.



I SKATE HOME FROM SCHOOL, like I've been doing since we moved into the new house. Colson's schedule is a discombobulated one, and even with my occasional extracurriculars, I'm always done before he is, so I opt to just take my longboard home.

I'm fine with it. The weather in So-Cal is perpetually gorgeous, so it's rarely a problem. And our school is only a couple of miles from home.

Waltzing through the house, quietness is expected at this time of day. Colson's still out doing God knows what. Mom usually stays out spending Tauren's money until at least six.

And then there's the fiancé himself.

He mostly works from home, and his office is at the far-side of the house, to limit distractions. Still, I often find myself passing it slowly, unable to stay away. Like right now.

The door is open a crack. Peering inside, I find him pacing, cell phone strapped to the side of his face. His deep voice booms in the room as he speaks to someone on the call, calmly, though demanding of attention. Tauren is one of those strong silent types. He gets his points across with how charming and intelligent he is, rather than being a ruthless asshole like my father. His power comes from confidence and self-awareness, I think.

I mean… who wouldn't be confident, looking like that?

My tongue slides over my lower lip while I watch his tall frame, stalking around his office slowly like a panther; smooth, graceful movements of poise and just the right amount of aggression. His long legs covered by tailored fabric, white button-down squeezing his muscles, the flexes stretching the material at certain twists. Collar unbuttoned to show off his clavicle… An ideally uninteresting spot that somehow captivates me.

I wonder what it tastes like…

Closing my eyes tight, I force myself to get it together. This man is about to be my *stepfather*. It doesn't matter how infinitely gorgeous he is… with his hair the color of caramel and ocean-blue eyes. Sharp jawline dusted

in stubble more mouthwatering than the most tasty of treats. Plush lips parting as he speaks…

God, I am so *gay.*

I've never looked at a girl the way I look at Tauren. With a desperate ache spreading through my loins like an un-dousable wildfire. Everything about him has mesmerized me from the first night we met. His voice, his perfect face, his unbelievably sculpted body…

But not only just the exterior of him draws me in like the proverbial moth to the flame. It's also his brain. His knowledge and his words and our similarities. There are tons of them.

Turns out he likes all the same things as me. He reads the same books, watches the same movies. We're both history nerds with a penchant for numbers, and a preference for DC to Marvel. Seriously… People like us are pretty rare as it is. What are the chances my mother—of all people—would bring home someone like Tauren, and then marry him?

They have *nothing* in common. I have no clue what Tauren sees in my mother, and even more so, how he doesn't see that she's only using him for his money.

It would be annoying if I allowed myself to fixate on it, which I don't. *I don't.*

Still, really, Mom?? She doesn't deserve a guy like Tauren Vance.

Shut up.

I love her because I have to, but she's about as deep as a puddle. The things my mom cares about are getting Botox, playing tennis with other waspy blondes, foreign cars, and bragging about the crazy shit she can afford. There's absolutely *no way* Tauren can't see right through her. But if he can, then why does he put up with it?

I'm so lost in my own thoughts, I barely notice that he's finished his phone call, and is now striding right toward me. I fumble backward, trying to put space between me and the door to his office, but it's too late. He whips it open and I'm face-to-face with my blue-eyed crush.

I mean, my *soon-to-be stepdad*.

Clearing my throat, my lips part, desperate to come up with *anything* to say about why I'm standing around outside his office.

I can create liquid nitrogen in a lab. I'm fluent in four languages. The *LA Times* published an article I wrote at thirteen.

Yet when my mom’s thirty-six-year-old fiancé is staring at me with those topaz eyes, I turn into a fumbling moron. I could be the smartest guy in the world, but it won’t give me *suave*, that’s for sure.

“Hey, Cy.” Tauren breaks the silence, smiling kindly down at me. He’s basically the same height as me, but his presence feels monumental. “How was school?”

I nod for a few seconds before figuring out how to speak again. “Good.”

He winks at me, and I melt. “As usual.”

A ridiculous huff gusts from between my lips, but I can’t think of anything cool to say. And he’s already slinking around me and sauntering away.

And I’m just fluttering in the hall, weightless, with the sound of his voice in my head as I watch him leave.

He’s not yours.

Stop picking the wrong ones, genius.

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9

COLSON



This asshole is boring as fuck.

I can tell just from looking at him he probably has erectile dysfunction.

Maybe he likes little boys. Maybe that's why he's been dragging me in here to stare at me for minutes on end since I was thirteen.

Maybe not.

He's not even *that* old, but he's one of those guys who's going bald and desperately clinging to the few hairs he has left, combing them in a weird direction. It's beyond foolish. We live in one of the richer areas of So-Cal. *Just go to a doctor who will take hair off your ass and slap it onto your head.*

It takes extreme effort not to burst out laughing at that thought. I'm high as fuck, and now all I can picture is this incontinent fool with a butt on top of his head.

"You're going to have to grow up eventually, Mr. Becker," Dean Granger mutters at me, looking his usual brand of displeased.

His comment settles in my chest and brings on some weed-induced paranoia. *Is he right?*

Of course he's right, dumbass. You were just thinking about an ass on someone's head like it's the funniest thing ever. You're practically eighteen…

Grow the fuck up.

My jaw clenches, anger rippling through me. *Don't tell me how to act, brain.*

He flips open my file, which is much thicker than those of most of my classmates due to all of my many discrepancies. "Your grades aren't awful, when you actually put in the work." His eyes lift. "When you actually show up."

I roll my eyes, my go-to maneuver. I'm surprised they even stay in my head. "I told you already, I only skipped because I needed to run home and get my homework. I forgot it."

"Yes, and Ms. Warren says you've used that excuse three times since you've been back," he retorts. "And that's just in her class."

"It's the truth…" I mutter petulantly.

This is irritating. What the fuck is the point of school, anyway? I have no desire to go to college. Believe it or not, I got into UCLA, but it's only because it's Tauren's alma mater and he pulled some strings. They don't really *want* me…

It doesn't matter. I'm not going either way. I just want to play guitar and chill. *That could be a career, couldn't it?*

"The lies have to stop, Mr. Becker." Granger shakes his head. "I know it's your senior year, and most kids think they can just coast, but I assure you, that's not the case. It would be pretty unfortunate if your brother were to go off to college in the fall, and you were held back… wouldn't it?"

At his mention of Cyrus, my spine stiffens, and my vision turns red.

I bite the inside of my cheek so hard I taste blood, forcing myself to keep from lunging over this desk and bashing his smug face in.

Instead, I go mute, eyes narrowed. I'm not having this fucking conversation again.

Cyrus's shadow doesn't want to talk anymore.

Only a few more minutes of silence, then he cuts me loose with detention. *Whatever.* Nothing I haven't done a million times before. On my way out of the office, I bump right into Jared Milligan. Or rather, he sort of shoulders into me, giving me one of his annoying prick looks.

I've never fucking liked this kid, especially since Cyrus stopped hanging out with him a couple of years ago. Ever since, he makes it a habit to run his mouth about my brother, so it's taking extreme effort not to whip my elbow back into his gut right now.

"Watch where you're going, fuckface," I growl at him.

He holds his hands up. “Oh, sorry, Becker. Didn’t see you there.” The dumb fucking smirk on his lips tells me he definitely *did*, and bumped me on purpose.

I’m already frustrated as fuck right now, what with every adult I know making it their mission to remind me I’m not my brother, and that when he goes off to UCLA, he’ll be too busy with his new genius life to worry about his fuck-up twin brother who can’t seem to get his head on straight. *Every single one*. I’m in no mood for this clown’s attitude, or his dumb face.

But if I waste him now, I’ll be late for detention. So… Maybe another time.

I simply clench my jaw and spin, stomping away from Jared with my middle finger up. *See? I’m growing up. Taking the high road and shit.*

Detention goes by painfully slow, as usual. I’m having this kid Grady do my homework for me in exchange for some of my mom’s Xanax, so that’s all taken care of. I spend the entire hour scribbling lyrics into my notebook. Some of them are bullshit, but lately I’ve been having crazy dreams, and I want to turn them into songs.

It’s probably stupid, but whatever. It passes the time.

Once I’m free, I check my phone. Of course there’s a text from my brother.

Cy: I’ll skate home, since I’m guessing you have detention.

I feel bad, but what can I do? Tauren Moneybags should’ve bought us each our own car.

I’m not trying to fuck Cy over on purpose, I swear. I just can’t seem to locate any fucks within myself. I’d love to have some to give, but they’re just not there.

I’m dead inside.

I told my psychiatrist, Dr. Roberts, that the meds he’s been prescribing make me feel that way. But he just said *that’s how you know they’re working*. I don’t think I agree, but I don’t know what to do about it. As soon as we moved back to Solana, Mom started forcing me to see him again. She said just because Dad’s not around anymore, doesn’t mean she’s forgotten about the *evil things* I’ve done.

Funny thing is she doesn’t know the half of it.

I tried not taking the pills at first, but Dr. Roberts found out. I’m not sure how, but he knew, and my mother flipped out like the obnoxious woman she is. It’s fucking annoying.

I can't wait until I turn eighteen so I can get the fuck out of here and never look back.

But then the thought of leaving Cyrus… It weighs me down, like I've been swallowing cement.

I know I'm not supposed to be so attached to Cyrus. I get that, and no amount of psychotherapy from Dr. Asshole will change it. My brother is my other half. Even when everything else inside me feels rotten, he's the good part of me I cling to with intense desperation. He's a light in the darkness.

I refuse to let that slip away from me.

In the school parking lot, I smoke a joint in my buddy Frazier's car. Then we go to In-N-Out before hitting up our favorite abandoned house off the freeway. It's a chill place outside of Solana Beach where we can drink and skate vert in the empty in-ground pool. Sometimes we bring girls, and they show us their titties when we land a trick, or shotgun a beer, or do really anything that qualifies as *pretty dope*.

I can whip some varial heel-flips on occasion, but usually I'm too drunk or stoned to pull it off, and I end up stumbling down into the bowl of the pool like a rag doll. And my friends laugh at me, while I bleed and laugh back, *'cause pain is funny and nothing matters.*

Tonight, my girlfriend, Annabelle, is here. Let's be clear; *she* calls herself my girlfriend because it gives her some edge at school. We have hooked up on occasion since I've been back, but I'm sorta bored with it.

I'm bored with most things. Except one… But that's another story, and I don't want to think about it anymore.

And so, I force myself to grin and bear it, like I do with mostly everything else. I let Annabelle kiss my neck while I fuck around on the guitar, strumming and humming my favorite Northstar song. My voice makes her wet… I know because she tells me all the time. On the outside, it helps my ego; my persona.

On the inside, I'm filled with black stuff. *Mold and decay*.

The sun's been gone for an hour when I decide to call it a night and go home. I have five missed calls from Mom by the time I'm pulling into the driveway. Stumbling inside this new giant house that's replaced the old one, she's on my back instantly.

"Nice of you to finally show up," she barks while I fling my backpack across the foyer. "Dean Granger called. *Again*."

"Yea, no shit." I brush past her, going to the kitchen for a Gatorade.

As I’m cracking her open and taking a gulp, tuning out the endless screeches of my mother, I catch Tauren sauntering into the room, carrying empty dishes. And he’s speaking to my brother.

“It was good, but I thought the ending could’ve been better,” he says, dropping his plate into the sink before taking Cy’s and doing the same.

“Oh. Yea… It wasn’t that great,” Cyrus’s voice flutters the way it does when he’s trying to impress Tauren, which is all the fucking time. My teeth grind together without me even noticing.

“Look what the cat dragged in.” Tauren gives me one of his grins and I roll my eyes.

His face scrunches as he leans in and sniffs me. I flinch away from him. “Back up, creeper.”

“You out cruising with Snoop Dogg again?” He lifts his brows, mouth curving as he ignores my threats.

“You couldn’t possibly sound older,” I huff. My eyes fall to my brother, who’s trying not to be obvious while he ogles Tauren.

I suppose he does a decent enough job, since no one but me picks up on it. Still, I can’t help the simmering look I shoot him, to which he clears his throat and mutters something about homework before dashing out of the room.

Tauren’s eyes follow Cyrus for only a moment before he turns back to me and Mom. “Snoop Dogg isn’t cool anymore?”

“Tauren.” My mother holds up her hand to him, still zoned in on me. “You need to get your act together. If you don’t graduate, Colson, I swear to God…”

“You swear to God *what*?” I growl, squinting at her.

“Alright alright.” Tauren gets between us. “Let’s just take a breath. Colson’s going to graduate, aren’t you, Col?” He aims a sturdy gaze at my face. “Because he remembers that talk we had about how if he doesn’t, he’ll be coming to work for me at my company.” A cocky smirk curls his lips. “And we all know how he feels about that.”

“Ugh.” I can’t help the sickened sound that escapes me at the thought. I’d rather chew broken glass.

“Exactly.” My soon-to-be stepfather’s head tilts. “So he’s going to stop fucking around, get his ass to class on time and graduate. Otherwise, he’ll spend all summer getting coffee for me and my… what did you call them again?”

I pause for a second. “Suckicon Valley douchebags.”

His smirk widens. “Right. *Them*.”

My eyes roll so hard they nearly pop out of my skull as I leave the room. I think my mom is still talking, but once again, I’m not listening. I don’t give a flying fuck what she has to say.

This is all her fault. She found a new rich guy to leech onto as easily as scheduling her next Botox injection and now we’re all stuck dealing with him. And it’s not like she even cares what happens to *me*. She just wants me out of the house as soon as possible so she doesn’t have to deal with pretending to give a fuck about mothering anymore. That way she can spend all her time with her braindead new beau.

The thing about Tauren Vance is that he seems like a good guy. Or rather, he seems like the guy who’s constantly trying to prove how *good* he is. It just makes me wonder what kind of bad he’s hiding inside… deep down.

No one is that perfect, or selfless. *Everyone has their demons.*

Since the first time we met Tauren, it was clear he’d be just like everyone else… Mesmerized by Cyrus; the good, smart twin. The twin who’s going places.

And just like everyone else, he’d ignore the bad egg. *Me.*

To his credit, he tries. He always makes a point to invite me places and include me in the things he and Cyrus like. But I don’t like those things. I don’t read for fun, unless it’s weird conspiracy theory sub-Reddits. I don’t like superhero movies. I can’t fucking *stand* history, math, or science, all Cy’s favorite things, which, as it turns out, are Tauren’s as well.

I have nothing in common with anyone in my household, hence why I spend most of my time with my friends. I have a different kind of brain… scattered and filled with dark thoughts.

No one here would understand that.

Stomping upstairs to my bedroom, I get there and reach for the handle. But before I can turn it, I pause, tilting my face to the next door. My blood rushes, as it tends to when I think the things I’m thinking now. Creeping closer, I hold my breath and press my ear up to my brother’s bedroom door.

All I hear are the smooth, winding melodies of the indie electronic music Cy listens to. He doesn’t get my obsession with screaming and badass guitar riffs. He listens to it for me, because he does anything for me. But I know he prefers his relaxing foreign stuff.

M83… Psshh. Or as I call it, car commercial music.

Tapping my finger gently on the wood of the door, I wonder if he can hear it over the music. I wonder if he can feel me out here, taunting him. My bad energy seeping into his good, curling around it like a vine and strangling the light right out of it until he's sick and *bad* like me.

I *know* he can. Because I know my twin brother in ways no one else does.

Not even fucking *Tauren*.

Stepdads don't know shit. It's a fucking fact.

Cyrus and I have been connected since before we were born. Our hearts beat side-by-side for nine months in the comfort of the womb. That's something very few people can understand. So even though we couldn't be more different… we have one very important similarity.

The same wicked blood flows through our veins, keeping us together forever.

And even though I turn away from his bedroom and go to my own, I know he'll feel me standing outside…

Until his eyes close and he drifts off to sleep.



Bleh.

That's the word that's describing my mood today. All week… For months, really. Since we got back. I haven't been feeling it.

Every day, I wake up and put on my scowl. I muss up my hair and throw on my favorite worn clothes that Mom hates, preparing myself for another meaningless day. They all blend together.

Some people think it's impossible to be sad in a place as perpetually sunny as Southern California. Humans like to associate weather with mood. When the sun's out, they're happy. When it rains, they're sad.

For me, it's the opposite. For once, I'd like a little rain. Some clouds… A sky as bleak and gray as my mood might be a refreshing change.

I thought the medication Dr. Roberts has been prescribing would, at the very least, help me concentrate more in school. Sometimes my mind feels

like it's bouncing all over the place. I start on one topic, and then next thing I know, I'm miles away from it.

Does everyone feel like that? I highly doubt it. There's no way… Nothing would get done.

The meds I'm taking don't feel like they're helping me whatsoever. But I have to take them, to appease my monster bitch mother. Once I graduate, I can try to get my own place and break free of the weekly doctor visits; the unnecessary pills.

Everyone's expectations of me to know exactly what I want to do with my life, just because we're graduating soon. I fucking don't.

Why are eighteen-year-olds required to know what we want for the rest of our lives, anyway?? We can't all be like my brother…

Cyrus is going to UCLA, and I can't decide if I want to follow him there, or leave him to do his thing. The latter feels like a million razorblades cutting me inside my chest when I think about it, but at least I know when he goes, he'll be away from Tauren, and this ridiculous crush he's been developing.

It's so obvious. Ever since the moment my brother laid eyes on Tauren, he's been gaga over the dude, and it's fucking *infuriating*.

Okay, fine… Tauren is good-looking. Even objectively, I have to admit he's attractive, but his body just doesn't make sense. He works out a lot, and he surfs, so I guess that's where it comes from. Still, he looks like those Instagram models I catch Cyrus looking at sometimes.

He's tall and strong and he's very down-to-earth. He *seems* like the perfect guy.

I'm not buying it. There has to be something wrong with him, and I'm determined to find out what it is. Maybe then I can prove to Cyrus that his precious crush is a fake, like everyone else in this bullshit town.

Third period finally comes to an end, and everyone files out of the classroom. Wandering the hall toward my locker, I'm up in my head. I'm wondering if I should skip lunch to go smoke behind the bleachers, when I hear someone snort out an obnoxious laugh. It catches my ear and I focus on what's happening up the hall. Specifically, right in front of my locker.

Or Cyrus's.

"What's the big deal, man?" Jared fucking Milligan and one of his dumb friends—some kid named Perry something who moved here last year—are standing on either side of my brother. It doesn't seem like they're

doing anything crazy to him, but Cy looks uncomfortable, as usual when dealing with most of our classmates. “I just want you to read it for me and tell me if it’s accurate.”

“I don’t have to read it.” Cyrus glares at Jared, his eyes flicking to the friend, who’s getting too close to my brother for my liking. “Just Google the information.”

“Oh, but I *want* you to read it, Cy-pie.” Jared grins, leaning up on Cyrus’s locker. “What better way to ensure the paper has heart than having the son of the criminal in question proofread it?”

My jaw clenches while I stalk the hall at an accelerated pace. Kids actually scatter like rats to get out of my way.

“I said I don’t want to read it. Now, please move. I need to get into my locker,” Cyrus grumbles, trying to project, though his voice is still mousy.

I can tell he’s nervous and trying like hell not to be. It burns rage like acid in my veins.

No one makes my brother nervous but me.

“Come on, pussy.” Perry what’s his name gives my brother a little shove on the shoulder, and I crack my knuckles, stomping right up to them.

All three faces twist in my direction. Cyrus looks uneasy, most likely because he knows I’m going to kick the shit out of these assholes. Worry flashes through Jared’s eyes as well, since he knows me. But this new prick…

Apparently, he hasn’t been filled in on what I do to people who fuck with my brother just yet. *I should get on that.*

“What’s happening over here?” I ask calmly. The eye of the storm.

“They’re doing their Econ project on Dad.” Cyrus sighs, stepping out of the way. He’s smart like that.

“Is that right?” I step up to Perry, getting in his face.

“Yo… chill.” The kid loses his edge in the blink of an eye. “It was just a joke.”

“No, see, yo momma’s so stupid she thought a quarterback was a refund. *That’s* a joke.” I push farther into his space, until he starts backing up. “You put your hands on my brother. I don’t find that funny. Do you?”

My eyes fly to Cyrus, and he shakes his head slowly. “Uh… no.”

I gesture with my hand. “See? No one’s amused.” I grab Perry by the collar. “I think you need to work on some new material.”

Before anyone else can react, before new kid can keep shaking in his goddamn Jordan's, my fist is raised and swinging at his face.

I hear people yelling around me, a circle of bodies instantly forming around us in the hall while I cock back and swing again, punching the kid's nose until he falls backward. I drop on top of him, gripping his shirt while I hit him some more, and he struggles to fight back.

I think I hear Cyrus telling me to stop, but it's all just echoes. Red splashes decorate my vision. My body is numb as I release my pent-up aggression on this kid's stupid fucking face.

My hatred for my father… The fact that he's a criminal and these kids are using that as an excuse to fuck with us.

My resentment for my mother, and the fact that she's the most selfish bitch in the world. Her new man, springing up out of nowhere and trying to steal my brother's affection.

Fuck it. Fuck it *all*. I'm going to bash it all away.

I'll smash it all into the fucking ground, one miserable prick at a time.

"Colson! Enough!" The voice that finally breaks through is that of Mr. Langley, a history teacher whose class is right next to where I'm attacking this fool.

He rips me off Perry, and I'm wheezing. My fists are numb and bloody, the adrenaline-soaked rage in my limbs making me shake. When I peer through my rage-blurred vision down at the kid on the ground, he looks pretty messed up. Not terrible. I sort of just got started, but I know right away I fucked up.

What else is new?

Dean Granger comes storming up the hall and grabs me by the arm, dragging me toward his office while scolding me. But I'm not listening.

The only thing I see is my brother, standing by our lockers, clutching a textbook to his chest.

Biting his lip.

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10

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TAUREN



I like to keep busy.

I remember my aunt always saying that *idle hands are the devil's playground*. Now, I'm not a religious person. Never have been. But I've always found certain parts of the Bible interesting, and there was something about this saying that stuck with me.

The devil's playground doesn't sound like somewhere I want to be hanging around.

I mean, sure… It would probably be fun. At *first*. But isn't that the point of the devil to begin with? He lures you in with promise of untold pleasures, and the moment you accept, you're *his* forever.

I don't want to be evil, or wicked. I've spent my entire adult life trying my hardest to be the best guy I can be. The hero, not the villain.

So I make sure these hands don't fall idle. Because I don't want to know what would happen if they did.

My friend, Brad, is talking, running through financial projections for next quarter via our Skype meeting. Working from home keeps me busy. And it's something I actually enjoy.

Brad is a co-founder of Knight-Life, and one-third of my startup. The other two-thirds being our other friend from UCLA, Scott, and of course, me. Brad is the marketing guru. He's the one who knows how, where, and when to sell our stuff to the right people. And Scott is big with the investors. He likes to build relationships with people. And then take their money.

Legally! Not like my soon-to-be-wife's ex.

And me? I’m the numbers guy. I’ve gotta say, I really love me some math.

I don’t know exactly how or why numbers come so well to me, but they just do. I think part of it has to do with its rigidity. Numbers are what they are. Math is black and white, for the most part—unless you want to get into physics and whatnot, which, I don’t, since it’s the link between math and science I’m not a huge fan of.

It may seem odd, someone who’s attempting to be as open-minded and casual as myself fancying stuff that can be so… inflexible. But I think that’s part of why I enjoy doing it for a living.

In the office, I get to let my inner control freak out of his cage.

Let me tell you, he’s been on a much shorter leash in the last six months.

At home, Carla is in charge. She spends a majority of our interactions telling me what to do. I’m alright with it, because this is what I signed on for. But still, it could be the reason why I’ve been working longer hours lately. Well, that and to avoid having to talk wedding details.

We’re getting married in three weeks. That’s another thing that’s been taking the idle out of my hands lately. We have a wedding planner who, for only the price of a small island, has managed to whip up a quaint ceremony followed by an unnecessarily extravagant reception, in a matter of months. Which according to him and my bride-to-be, is something that can take years.

With all that said, I told Carla from the start I’m not a flashy person, and to leave me out of the wedding plans as much as possible. Maybe she thought I was joking or something, because she’s constantly asking me to run frivolous errands. I’ve been compromising on it, but I can feel my inner casual beginning to slip. I’m two floral arrangements away from reminding her that the one who makes the money, and who hires the Beyonce of wedding planners, should be exempt from this bullshit.

“So I think if we just send the four million to the Nigerian prince, it’ll really help him out.”

I zone back in on Brad’s words, flinging upright in my desk chair. “I’m sorry… what did you just say??”

He grins at me over my computer screen. “I knew you weren’t listening.”

“I’m *listening*. I am.” I nod, clicking my pen a bunch of times. “Sorry, it’s just…”

“Wedding stuff,” he sighs. “Yea, I know. You’ve been distracted since you proposed. Methinks the lad dost not desire his upcoming nuptials, hm?”

His face lights up and he bursts into a cackle at his own joke, while I just roll my eyes in clear exasperation.

“Okay, Shakespeare. Calm down.”

“I’m just saying.” He chuckles. “You’re obviously stressed and annoyed by this wedding, which begs the question we’ve been asking you for months… Why are you doing this again?”

My jaw tightens. “Are we done? I wanted to get a surf in before Carla gets back from wherever she’s spending my money today.”

He laughs some more, then nods. “Yea yea, fine. We can be done.”

“Good. See you tomorrow.”

I’m just about to end the Skype call when he stops me. “Oh, just one more thing!” I stare at him expectantly in wait. “You change your mind about a bachelor party? After all, you are three weeks away from permanent genital lockdown…”

“Piss off,” I mutter while he laughs maniacally, clicking to end the call.

Spinning in my chair, I gaze out the large bay window in my office that looks out over the ocean. Brad’s just fucking with me. He and Scott have been on my case constantly since I proposed to Carla. They’re my best friends in the world, but they can be ruthless in their mockeries. Although a part of me knows they’re not one hundred percent kidding.

I’m sure mostly everyone thinks I’m insane for taking on, not only Carla, who is basically the most high-maintenance person I’ve ever met, but also her two sons.

But in all honesty, so far, the twins are the easy part.

Well, Cyrus is. He’s beyond easy, being that we get along well, plus he’s a total homebody. He doesn’t stay out all night like his brother, forcing me to listen to Carla bitch about how it’s only a matter of time until he *knocks up some tramp*.

Still, I’m standing by my thoughts from before I proposed. I want to help these boys. I’m not sure what this calling is, coming from somewhere inside me; a place I rarely think about or give attention to. But it’s in there. A small voice telling me these kids need me.

After getting to know them over the last six months, even more so since they began living with me, I've noticed some things. Cyrus has near-crippling social anxiety. He's opened up to me in the last few months, gotten more comfortable. But I've seen him get worked up before, which then triggers his asthma. When I asked Carla if he sees a psychiatrist, like Colson does, she said told me he doesn't need one.

He's a genius, she said. *I don't want anyone ruining that by pointing out his issues.*

Those words have since settled in my gut, like a boulder of uneasy contempt just chilling in there. I really can't comprehend how she can be so callous regarding her own flesh and blood. And I know I don't have kids of my own, but I always assumed if I did, I would do anything to keep them happy. I don't think the happiness of her sons is really on Carla's radar.

As far as Colson goes… The *evil twin*—Carla's actual words—he's a hot mess, sure. But I see past the front he's putting up. Beneath the angry, scowling façade, the chipped black nail polish, and ripped up clothes, is someone vulnerable, neglected, and carrying the weight of mental illness.

He sees that psychiatrist once a week… And he's on medication, so I have to assume it's helping him. Still, I worry that it's not enough.

I'd like to try and be there for him more. If only he'd let me. And if only I knew how to help.

It's just about lunchtime, which means I need to hit the beach now if I want to ride the waves for an hour and come back to finish up work before dinner. Another thing I've tried implementing as an almost-stepdad are family dinners. I guess Carla's ex wasn't big on it, unless they had guests they were *performing* for. And I think that's ludicrous.

Families should sit down for at least one meal a day together. It just feels like something that needs to happen. But trying to get everyone to comply is tougher than I expected.

Usually, it ends up being just Cyrus and me eating dinner while Carla has a juice and talks on her phone. And Colson is off… God knows where. Hopefully *not* getting some tramp pregnant.

I leave my office and head outside to the pool house, getting dressed in my wet suit and waxing up my board. I really love to surf, and I've been doing it since I was a kid. It relaxes me.

My mother died of cancer when I was six, which was when my Aunt Sylvia took me in. I never knew my dad. Maybe that's another reason I'm

so eager to be there for Carla's boys. To give them something I never had growing up…

Our little house in Venice was right on the beach. And after my mom passed, I was so shaken, so torn the hell up, confused, angry, all of it. I needed something to focus on. A distraction.

Surfing became that thing.

There's nothing like leaving all your worries on the shore, shutting your brain off and getting on top of a wave. The sight, sound, and smell… they're my therapy.

Just as I'm heading outside, though, I hear my phone ringing in my pants. I sincerely contemplate ignoring it, but the compulsiveness in me won't allow that.

Rushing to the ringing phone, I answer it quickly. "Tauren Vance."

"I'm going to fucking kill him."

Six words and I already know my afternoon is ruined.

Letting out a sigh, I ask, "What happened now?"

"Colson got into a fight at school," Carla seethes into the phone. "They're holding him in the dean's office."

I rub my eyes hard with my fingers. "Okay…" The line is silent for a moment, and I can feel the tension being absorbed into all my muscles. "And let me guess, you can't go?"

"Tauren, are you kidding right now?" She does that whining shriek that only seems to have started after I proposed. "I'm with Marcus for another four hours! I told you, we have more dress fittings for Holly and Brigette, then we have to stop by the venue and yell at Flora about something, and then the centerpieces—"

"Alright alright alright! Jesus…" My fucking temples are throbbing. "I'll go to the school and get him."

"You're going to have to speak with Dean Granger, too," she adds casually. "He's pissed. You might have to write a check or something to keep him from expelling that goddamn heathen."

"Carla, he's your *son*." My head shakes while I strip out of my wetsuit and get redressed. She scoffs into the phone. "Okay, well, is Granger going to care that I'm going and not you?"

"I already filled out the necessary forms when they started this semester," she mumbles, as she's barely paying attention anymore. "You're registered as a parent in their files."

This kind of surprises me for a moment, though I'm not sure why. We're getting married in three weeks. The boys live at my house, and I have every intention of being a hands-on stepdad. So, it makes sense that she'd do this, I suppose.

But still… it seems a bit fast. Part of me thinks she did it so that she no longer has to deal with the boys. But that can't be right…

Can it?

"Alright. I'm on my way."

I hang up the phone before I take on any more stress from that conversation, grabbing my keys and heading out to the driveway. In my Maserati, I cruise the five minutes up the street to Solana Beach Preparatory School, pulling into the visitor's lot.

I've only been here twice. On the day we came in to register the boys for their senior year, literally the day after we moved into our house in Solana, and on their first day back when I decided to drop them off. Naturally, they were mortified. Or at least Colson was. He practically leapt out of the car while it was still moving. Cyrus, on the other hand, sat back for a moment, and he wouldn't say it out loud, but I think he was giving himself a few extra seconds to panic inside before rejoining a group of students who had ostracized his family a year prior.

I can't be certain how much of it Carla was exaggerating, but the news reports on Dustin Becker's crimes were ruthless. I know for a fact paparazzi followed them around for a few weeks while they were relocating to Oceanside. And social media makes everything a thousand times worse.

I can only imagine that the twins have had to deal with some backlash on their dad's behalf. Most teens are pretty insensitive. The boys haven't confessed anything to me about issues at school. But then, would they?

Strolling inside the school, I go straight to the dean's office, wanting nothing more than to get this over with. I don't care what happens, I'm not letting them expel Colson. *Over my dead body.* He's graduating this year, if I have to put on a cap and gown and accept a diploma on behalf of his brooding ass.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Vance," the lady at the front desk greets me. Her brows zip.

But before she can even say anything. "Carla is occupied. Where's Colson?"

I look past her desk to the waiting area outside Dean Granger's actual office and see Colson, slouched over in a chair with a bag of ice on his hand. I can't help how my jaw clenches. This kid is a serious pain in my ass. *And it's only been a few months!*

"He's back here. Follow me."

The older gray-haired woman leads me to the waiting area. As soon as we approach, Colson peers up, scowl intact as usual. But when he sees it's me and not his mother, I catch a flash of remorse.

"Hey, look. It's Mayweather." I give him a pointed look, to which he rolls his eyes. *Standard.*

The receptionist knocks on Granger's door, then pops her head in before turning back to us. "Go right in."

She wanders off, leaving us to face the music. I'm not sure why *I'm* facing music. I didn't fucking do anything other than propose to a woman with twin boys. But here we are.

Taking a seat before the dean's desk, Colson sits next to me, slumping over once more until I kick him in the shin.

"Ow! Bitch," he hisses quietly.

"Sit up straight," I growl.

"Jeez, chill," he mutters, but straightens all the same.

Granger eyes Colson for a moment, severe displeasure lining his features before he turns to me. "Good afternoon, Mr. Vance."

"Dean." I nod.

He folds his hands on the desk that separates us. "I'm not sure if your wife filled you in on the details—"

"They're not married yet," Colson mumbles under his breath. I kick him again and he gripes a curse.

"Mr. Becker here beat a fellow student bloody," Granger goes on. "Perry Kelso has a fractured nose. I'm sure you can understand how serious a matter this is."

"Of course I do." I shift in my seat. *I really fucking hate this.*

I purposely avoided getting into trouble in school because I didn't want to have to sit and listen to adults lecturing me on how to behave. So dealing with it now, as an almost-forty-year-old is beyond irritating.

I aim a withering glare at Colson. He simply swallows visibly and goes back to staring at his lap.

“Violence of any kind is simply not tolerated at Solana Preparatory.” The dean sits back. “And trust me, Mr. Kelso’s parents are irate.”

“I’m sure they are,” I reply, trying my hardest to sound sincere, though it’s difficult. I know the Kelsos and they’re obnoxious. I don’t exactly care how *irate* they are. I turn to Colson once more. When he doesn’t look at me, I clear my throat, loud. His eyes spring up to mine. “Well? What do you have to say for yourself?”

Colson looks like he’s holding back a lot. I’m sure—*I’d bet my favorite surfboard on it*—he didn’t attack the Kelso boy out of nowhere, unprovoked. If that kid is anywhere near as entitled as his father, I’m positive he deserved every lick Colson gave him.

But of course, I can’t *say* that.

So I raise my brows at my soon-to-be stepson, and give him a look that says, *you know what he wants to hear.*

Colson swallows visibly, our eyes remaining locked for a few more heavy seconds before he turns to the dean. “I’m sorry. I’m… very *very* sorry for my actions. They were wrong, and I feel… awful.”

He almost gags on the word *awful*, which has me biting back a grin.

“Let me talk to the Kelsos,” I tell Granger. “I know Wyatt well. I’m sure we can work something out.”

Granger stares at me for a moment in contemplation. “That’s all well and good, but it doesn’t rectify the matter at hand. Since he returned to this school, Colson has been a nuisance. I feel like I’m on the phone with Ms. Becker every other day.”

“I know, and trust me, no one is more sympathetic than me, since I’m the one who has to hear it from her twenty-four-seven.” I sit forward. “All I’m asking for is one more pass. The boys went through something very traumatic. The effects don’t just disappear overnight.”

“Well, Cyrus is a model student,” Granger points out, and I can feel Colson seething at my side. “We’re even considering him for valedictorian, which is unheard of for a student who didn’t attend all four years here…”

“I get that,” I speak up, struggling to keep my irritation under wraps. “But just because these two boys are identical in looks, it doesn’t mean they process things the same way. School is an outlet for Cyrus, but he internalizes. Colson is more extroverted with his emotions. I’m sure you can understand that, yes?”

Dean Granger glances at Colson, who I can feel gawking at me.

“I’m just asking for a little more sympathy,” I go on. “Maybe Colson could do some community service or something?”

The room is quiet for moments, during which I’m on pins and needles. I want this to be done. I don’t want to keep arguing for the sake of someone who made a mistake. Colson isn’t a bad kid, despite what everyone seems to think. He just has issues, and he needs more attention. And fewer people constantly berating him about how different he is from his brother.

Finally, Granger sighs and rubs his eyes. “Alright, fine. Three-day suspension. And when he returns next week, I’ll have a nice long list of things for him to do around the school.” Granger grins at Colson, who looks like he wants to punch *him* now. Granger peeks back at me. “You’ll be speaking with the Kelsos?”

I nod. “Yes, yes. Of course. Thank you, Dean.”

I kick Colson one last time and he grunts. “Thank you so much, Dean Granger. I appreciate your leniency.”

Granger isn’t buying it, clearly, but I think he’s as done with this nonsense as we are, so he just gives us a curt smile. We both stand up to leave, but Granger stops me. “While I have you, Mr. Vance, I should mention that we’re looking for graduation sponsors.”

His smirk grows as more annoyance fizzles in my blood. “Call my assistant and I’ll send a check. Good day, Dean Granger.”

Neither of us say a word while we leave the school and walk to the parking lot. We’re completely silent as we climb into my car and drive home. It’s not until I pull up in front of our house and turn off the engine that words are uttered.

Colson tries to open the door, but I lock it fast before he can. He shoots a glare at me, though I ignore it, turning in my seat to face him.

“Tell me what happened,” I demand. My tone is calm enough; I’m trying to be supportive while also making sure he knows he doesn’t have a choice. He needs to talk to me, now.

He shakes his head and rolls his eyes, but says nothing.

“Colson.” My tone grows firmer. “I’m serious. You obviously didn’t just beat the shit out of that little snot for no reason. Tell me what happened.”

He stays silent, but my glare on him doesn’t break. Then he winces, his hand dropping to his stomach for a moment.

My brows pull together in concern. “What’s wrong? Did he catch you in the stomach or something?”

Colson shakes his head, taking a deep breath and letting it out, as if he’s pushing through pain. “In his dreams…”

“Colson.” I shake my head at him. “You need to tell me what happened back there. I can’t help you unless you talk to me.”

“Yea, well, I guess you can’t help me, then,” he mutters.

“How do you know if you don’t let me try?” I lift a brow at the side of his face. He peeks at me. “I’m just asking for one answer to one question. It doesn’t have to be pulling teeth.”

“What difference does it make?” he mumbles, picking at his chipped nail polish. “I took the blame, just like I always do.”

“For what?”

He leans back in the seat, propping his head on the headrest while he stares up at the ceiling of the car. “He put his hand on Cyrus.”

The strangest wave of rage flutters through my stomach at his confession, but I push it down. “Like how? Was he hurting him?”

His shoulder lifts in a mild shrug. “Not necessarily. But still… Him and that fuckface Jared Milligan were giving Cy a hard time. About Dustin…” His eyes flit to mine.

I sit back slowly and nod in realization. *Gotcha.*

“Say no more,” I rumble after a beat, then unlock his door and open mine.

I get out of the car and head for the house, but Colson hangs back for a moment. I can feel him watching me; a strange sensation. I’m not sure how I recognize the feeling of his green eyes on me, studying me. But it’s familiar.

It feels interesting. But I don’t want to think about that right now either.

Colson steps out of the car with his backpack, and I stop him before we get inside.

“Don’t worry about your mother,” I tell him. “I’ll handle it. You just go to your room. You’re definitely grounded, so I expect to see you at dinner every night, at least until the wedding.”

He narrows his gaze at me, the green in his irises this deep almost teal, like the ocean during a storm. He looks like he’s still trying to play that pissed off part he swears by, but I notice the faint lilt of a grin ghosting over his lips.

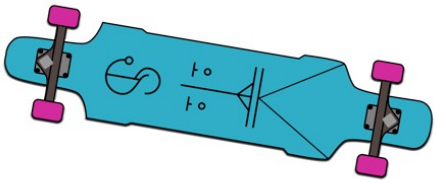
“Thanks a lot, Stepdaddy,” he grumbles as he pushes past me into the house. “And good luck with that *wedding thing*.”

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11

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CYRUS



There was a wedding.

It was large and quite fancy; an ostentatious display expected of people like our family. Like my mother.

Mom marrying Tauren Vance was an *event* rather than a celebration of holy matrimony. It was a show. And Colson and I were just extras, or stagehands.

Sure, we both stood up there in our Tom Ford tuxedos, as two of Tauren's four groomsmen. We watched the performance, attempting to portray support. Well, *I* attempted it. Colson kept up his typical brand of scowl, which was more comforting to me than it probably should have been.

But I tried to smile and be happy for my mother. After all, she was finally getting what she wanted. A new rich guy to rely on for an identity that only money can buy someone like Mom. She'd done her due-diligence and hooked a second husband. And he got us out of the impoverished nightmare we'd experienced last year.

And now here we are… back to our regularly scheduled programming. Back in Solana. Back in the wealthy elite circle of SoCal. Back to private chefs and chauffeurs, housekeepers and fake friends with smiles a million times faker than mine.

All the shit Mom needs to survive.

It was a painful experience… Watching Mom marry Tauren. And not because it reminded me of my own father rotting in prison, or the brokenness of our home.

It hurt my chest like the tiny pokes and prods of a dull needle. Something subtly suffocating, an ache just beneath the surface. That's how it feels to watch someone you're in love with marry your own mother.

I know what you're thinking… *Really, Cy? Love?? How can you be sure? You've haven't known him all that long.*

And the truthful answer is that I'm *not* sure if it's love. I just know what I feel.

I've only been in love once… And this is very different from that, but for different reasons. They can't really even be compared aside from one similarity, which tells me that what I feel for Tauren is love.

The overpowering need to risk it all for that person.

The two loves I feel are almost polar opposites. One was born into me… tied to me at birth. It's something I've housed deep inside my chest since the moment I took my first breath. Something that, even though I know it shouldn't, keeps me alive; keeps me going.

It's wrong on so many levels… But I wouldn't be able to shake it if I tried.

The *good* bad.

And this new love, well, it's the very definition of *new*. It's unprecedented and fresh. Something that just popped up and said, *hello. I'm here now, and I'm not going anywhere.*

I've felt this way about Tauren Vance since the moment I laid eyes on him… When he came home with Mom and was introduced as her new boyfriend. And ever since that night, no matter how wrong it also is, I haven't been able to stop thinking about him.

Everything about him is exactly what I would want in a man. Smart, funny—in a dry, nerdy sort of way, like me—caring and kind, and so beyond gorgeous it's almost unreasonable.

And of course, because the universe hates me, not only is he twice my age, but he's now married to my mother. He's my *stepfather*.

Yes, my life is that tragic.

Tauren and Mom got married three days ago, and now they're off on their honeymoon in the Maldives for a week. Leaving me alone with my other confusing love…

I'm standing on the other side of the sliding glass door, looking out back where Colson is hanging out with his friends by the pool. Mom warned us

not to have any parties, which is like leaving a velociraptor in a pen full of baby goats and expecting not to return to a bloodbath.

To Colson's credit, there are only about ten people here now; just his usual bong-ripping, pill-popping crew. But regardless of how many of them are out there, it's still not really my scene. I don't do parties. Colson knows that, which is why I'm sure he's not expecting to see me out there, laughing and drinking and jumping into the pool naked.

There are a few topless girls splashing each other while the guys look on eagerly. But not me.

I'm not interested.

That's not to say I haven't noticed a couple of Col's friends. I've always thought Charlie was cute, not that I'd ever voice that to Colson. I'd rather not invite violence like that.

Plus, right now, I'm more invested in watching my brother. He's sitting on a chair by the fire pit, strumming on his acoustic guitar. I can vaguely hear it through the door, but not enough. So I pull the door open a crack to get a better listen.

He's playing a song that sounds familiar—one of his favorites—though I can't quite place it without words. Still, I think I recognize it, and I *love* how it sounds. Even more so, I love watching his fingers move, and his concentration. The way nothing and no one else matters while he plays…

The world around him could be falling apart, collapsing into destruction and rubble, and he'd still be strumming the chords.

He parts his lips, like he's going to start singing a verse, and I listen closely, eager for my brother's voice, those smooth, raspy melodies that entice my ears.

But then someone shouts, "Hey, it's Col's body-double!"

I flinch and glance right at one of my brother's idiot friends who just spotted me and is waving like a drunk fool. When I peek back at my brother, I find him staring at me, his fingers having stopped their dance on the strings.

I swallow hard with our green eyes locked as Colson's head tilts right, a look that I just know is telling me I don't belong out there.

Colson wants to keep me hidden. Keep the two parts of his world separate.

Spinning quick, I turn on my heel and dart back through the house, away from the party. I'm scolding myself inside as I stomp up the stairs to

my bedroom. I shouldn't have been over there, anyway… Staring at my brother like that.

It's just so hard not to get swept up in him. Everyone else does, because he's a captivating person. He's mysterious in his ways, with the tattoos and his painted black fingernails and his ambiguous sense of fashion.

I can't help it. I'm always on the other side of a glass door, watching him with stars in my eyes.

And after what's happened between us… I'm tied to him in so many other ways now. More than just being his twin.

Upstairs in my bedroom, I lie down on my bed and pop in my earbuds. Queuing up one of my playlists, I let the dreamy electric beats fill my ears while I stare up at the ceiling in thought. I'm so very *aware* of where I am right now…

Even though this is a different mansion from the one we grew up in, it's the same town. The same people around, the same vibe of wealth and vanity. It's almost eerie, how it feels like nothing ever changed. We're right back where we started, only now my asshole father has been replaced by the knight in shining armor who saved us.

My eyes fall shut, and I imagine that I'm back in Aunt Lily's house. In our shared bedroom, twin beds on opposite sides of the room, one mutually divided dresser. A space small enough that even if we didn't want to, we'd be on top of each other.

So many nights in that little room began with lights out, and both of us pretending to sleep. It was a nightly dance, wondering if it would be him or me who'd get up first, and quietly slink across the room.

Most of the time, we couldn't stop ourselves from touching and kissing, being as quiet as possible while burning alive from the pleasure of doing something so wrong the mere act jeopardizes your entire life.

But some nights we would just sleep, together. If I'd had a hard day at school from not fitting in, and was feeling like I had to hide who I really am from the world, Colson would slip into my bed and just hold me. If he had a hard day dealing with the bullshit that piles up in his head, I would go to him, and heal him in any way he needed me to.

We never had sex. We haven't... and it's definitely not because I don't want to. I know it's a line that I should work up all my strength to ensure we don't cross.

But then another part of me also thinks it's sort of inevitable.

My love for my brother has been building slowly over all the years of our lives, piece by piece, stacking up like bricks. The night that he kissed me for the first time, the floodgates opened. And ever since then, I spend my days anxiously awaiting the next time he chooses to grace me with another taste.

The waiting is *my* responsibility. Because I know Colson doesn't feel the same way I do for him. To him, it's all a game. Something he does in secret because he's bored, or because he wants to own me… To piss off our father, and society. To spit in the faces of people who try to tell him what to do. It happens on *his* terms, because he's always in control.

Me, on the other hand… well, I just take what he gives me, savoring each time, knowing I'll never have anything like this with anyone else.

It makes me feel like a junkie, craving and itching for my next fix. At this point, it's been months…

And I miss him.

As if he could hear my heart screaming out for him, my bedroom door opens, and I find green eyes and mussed up strands of obsidian hanging in front of them. Popping out my earbuds, I sit up slowly as he slinks into the room, closing the door behind him. And locking it.

My pulse immediately speeds up as I stare at him, swallowing over a very scratchy throat.

"What are you doing in here all alone, good twin?" he rasps, stepping up to my bed. The dark and devious glint in his eyes is impossible to miss, and it delivers a quick jolt between my legs.

"What are *you* doing up here, bad twin?" I whisper, blinking up at him. "Shouldn't you be downstairs with your groupies?"

His lips curve into the slightest smirk. "There's something up here that I want…" My chest thumps. He sits down on the bed next to me. "Something I can't get down there."

"Col…" I shake my head, because it's the show. I have to put up a fight… I have to at least *act* like we're struggling against this. "It's wrong."

"Mhm," he mumbles, completely ignoring me as he reaches over and slides my t-shirt up with his fingers. "I brought you a gift."

Surprise graces my features as I watch him touching me, gently, teasing me because he knows how badly I want it. He *knows* what's going on inside me, before I even get a chance to figure it out.

Colson pushes my t-shirt up my chest, swooping it over my head and off my arms, then goes for the button on my jeans. “See, I know you’ve been wanting this… fantasizing about it and thirsting for it. But you can’t actually have it, and it drives you crazy inside.”

My brows knit while I watch him tugging my pants down, leaving me in just my boxer briefs, while he’s still fully dressed. I’m exposed for him, always.

He’s the only one.

“W-what?” I ask, wondering what he’s referring to as a flush creeps up my neck from the sight of his eyes locked on the outline of my erection.

God, I know it’s wrong, but I’m dying for him to touch me. It’s been way too long, and I’m practically salivating for it. *Lord, forgive me. I know I’m going to Hell, but…*

Colson grins, his finger running along the waistband of my boxers before he pulls them down and off my legs completely. Now I’m totally naked and squirming on the bed. The urge to cover up is strong, since he’s just looking at me. I’m so nervous I can barely breathe.

But then he reaches behind his back and pulls something out of the back of his pants from beneath his hoodie.

He holds it up in front of me and my stomach clenches while heated humiliation rushes all over my body.

It’s a dildo. A large black one.

“Where the hell did you get that?” I grunt, eyes rounded at the size of it. It’s not massive, but still bigger than any sex toy I’d consider buying. Not that I think about buying sex toys…

Shut up.

Colson laughs wickedly. “It’s Troy’s girlfriend’s.”

I’m sure my face is painted in my state of flabbergast. “She brought it to your party??”

He shrugs. “I have no idea why… Maybe she wanted Troy to use it on her.” He leans over me a bit. “Maybe she wanted to use it on him.”

He tugs his lip between his teeth, then grazes my erection with the fake silicone one.

I flinch. “Ew… please tell me it’s been cleaned.”

He laughs again, then brings it up to his nose, sniffing it while grinning at me. I can’t help the look of sheer horror I’m giving him, which is cracking him the hell up.

“Smells clean,” he sighs in assurance, then places the toy in my hand.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” Looking it over, I’m unable to hide the way my cock twitches just from holding this thing, being naked and all. Every move my dick makes is fully visible.

“I think you know,” Colson croons, covering my body with his, lips hovering over mine. “Now’s your chance to lose your virginity, good twin. And it won’t be that serious, because it’s a fake dick.”

My lips part while I gaze up at him, the feel of his clothes brushing my naked flesh stirring up a cocktail of discomfort and need that turns me on more than I’ll ever understand.

This is my problem… I like when it hurts. The uncomfy feels good to me now…

Clearly, I like the *bad*.

“So I’m supposed to use this… on myself?” I hum to my brother.

“Well… Of course I expect to be invited to watch,” he purrs. “You know… to make sure you’re doing it right.” A soft whimper comes out of my lips, and he brushes them with his, causing them to shiver. “You’ve used your fingers before… Remember?”

The memory splashes in my mind, of us in our tiny, shared bedroom. Three of my own fingers inside myself while Colson jerked our dicks together…

“Mmmff…” A needy sigh leaves my mouth again and my brother chuckles, dragging his mouth down my throat. “Of course I remember…”

He nips me, and I flinch. “Good.” He sits up and scoots off me, then nods across the room. Toward my mirror. “Face that way and watch yourself. That way it’ll feel like I’m doing it to you.”

My eyes connect with my own in the mirror, and I gulp. Looking at myself lying naked on my bed, erection throbbing between my legs and dildo in hand, a shiver of excitement rushes through me…

Because I look exactly like him. And I want him *so bad*.

I peek at him, and he licks his lip. We can’t have this… It most certainly is a line we should never, *ever* cross.

But that doesn’t stop the want, and that’s the most awful part. That no matter how badly we know this is wrong, it’ll never stop me from craving it.

“C-can I have some… lube?” I ask my brother. Watching his gaze grow heavy as his chest moves more rapidly sets my blood ablaze.

Knowing he’s as turned on as I am has always driven me absolutely wild. Ever since the first time we jerked off side by side.

Colson goes to my nightstand and opens the drawer, without me even telling him where to look, pulling out a little tube of KY I bought at the pharmacy. It’s all I have, because I’m still a virgin, but I need something for those secret nights when I have to stuff *something* inside myself or I feel like I’ll die.

He stands at the edge of the bed, unbuttoning and unzipping his jeans, reaching inside to adjust his very visible erection. Then he kneels on the bed over one of my thighs, pushing my legs apart forcefully until I gasp.

“Spread open wide, Cy,” he commands, voice low and throaty and so arousing I’m trembling all over while I do what he says.

Glancing up at the mirror, I see myself spread-eagle, and my chest flutters. I bend at the knees as Colson growls, taking my hand, the one holding the dildo, and bringing it up to my mouth.

Our eyes connect as he nudges the shiny black thing up to my lips, then pushes it in. I grunt, sucking on the round head while he pants right above me. Leaning in, he licks a line up the shaft of the dildo, lapping up to where my mouth is.

I whine, obstructed by the object, sucking it harder while Colson pushes and pulls it, in and out of my lips, writhing into me while he uses his tongue on the inches. When he grazes my lip with his tongue, chills sweep across my flesh.

This is already so goddamn hot, I have no clue what we’re doing. But I’m convinced I’m going to erupt in minutes.

Colson yanks the dildo out of my mouth with a sigh and backs up, breathing ragged already. “Greedy for cock, good twin?”

I nod slowly, feverish and zapping like a live wire. My hooded gaze stays on my brother as he pours lube onto the dildo, stroking it all over the silicone toy. I witness him swallow as he hands it back to me. Then he leans back, giving me space.

“Show me what you got.” His eyes fall to the space between my legs.

I clench and shiver at the shame of him seeing me there, my dick leaking onto my abs. Taking in a deep breath, I bend my knees farther, bringing the dildo down. Nudging it into the crack of my ass, my eyelids droop when the slick plastic runs over my hole.

“Eyes open,” Colson growls. The sound of his voice has my eyes snapping back open to find him glaring hungrily at the dildo while I push it more, attempting to relax enough to get it in. “Godfuckindammit…” he hisses, his fingers digging into the comforter.

Needing to be filled more than I’ve ever needed *anything*, I give the object another shove, working it gradually against the resistance of my body, eyes bouncing between the mirror displaying what I’m doing to myself and my twin brother who’s hungrily squirming by my feet, looking like he’s two seconds away from lunging at me.

“Push it in, baby,” he breathes, rough but almost pleading. His pupils are so wide the black is swallowing up the green. “Break through… I know you want to.”

Hearing him, his words and his tone and him calling me *baby*, which happens only when he’s swept up in the games we play in the dark, drives me to urge the dildo harder, until finally the head slips inside me and I groan.

“*God*, that’s it,” he gasps, sinking his hand into his pants. “*Fuck*… take more.”

Nodding hazily at his command, I pump the dildo into my ass, slowly urging it deeper, taking inches and inches while my entire body buzzes. This thing is definitely bigger and thicker than my fingers. And the toothbrush travel case I used one time because I was desperate. It burns like crazy, but it feels amazing.

And when it grazes that certain spot, my eyes roll back and my back arches.

“*F-fuck*, that’s… so good,” I mewl, flicking my wrist to leisurely pump myself with the toy while breaths break from my lips. My nipples are bunched into little pebbles, skin glistening with a sheen of sweat as I force myself to watch in the mirror; the image Colson wanted me to see.

It looks like he’s doing it…

My head falls back onto the pillow again. I’m swept up into a cloud of the most intense pleasure I’ve ever felt, swirling around and around like a tornado. My hips move while the fake dick slides in and out, chasing some friction I can’t reach.

My eyelids crack and I peek up at Colson, whose pants are around his ass, his fist tugging slowly at his cock while he watches what I’m doing.

Licking my lips, I can't move my gaze from his long, perfect dick; stretched and full, veins popping, blushed pink head shimmering with arousal.

God, I love the sight of his dick. It makes my fucking mouth water, like it's remembering the times I've sucked on it.

Those forbidden times… The stuff I'm never supposed to do to my brother. It gives me life, and I wish it didn't. I wish like hell it wasn't like this, but I can't help it.

I'm damned. Cursed.

I'm not the good one. *I'm even worse than he is.*

My face burns as I roll onto my side, partially onto my stomach, just enough to rut into the bed while my hand continues to work the dildo in my ass. My hips chase the friction, humping as I come up on the rigid plastic, in and out, panting and purring at the most fantastic sensation ever invented.

I guess it's like losing my virginity, though I'm painfully aware that it isn't real, and I desperately want it to be. Closing my eyes, I mash my face into the comforter and imagine…

I pretend this is really happening. That I'm finally taking the cock I want, just like I want it.

That the dick pumping between my cheeks is attached to a sexy, black-haired boy who looks just like me, his strong, masculine hands gripping me and holding me open.

Or… what if it was Tauren?

A soft moan leaves my lips as my cock leaks on the bed.

I want that, too. I want Tauren Vance behind me right now, stuffing my face into the mattress while he fucks me hard. I don't know what makes me think he'd want to fuck me rough. It's just this fantasy I have of him, gripping my throat while he rides my ass deep.

"Cyrus…" Colson's voice snaps me out of it, and I feel him inching over me, straddling my thigh. He smacks my hand away from the dildo inside me and takes over, driving it deep, then pulling back. A gravelly hum escapes me. "You like that, don't you?"

"I love it," I whine, pushing my hips back to get the toy deeper.

"Mmm… you love cock in your ass, right?" he rumbles, and I feel him pushing his pants down farther while he feeds the toy into my ass. "You wish it was a real dick, huh?"

A mewl slides up my throat and I nod. *Yes… yes yes yes, I want it real.*

“You want to feel skin on skin?” He grinds his erection into my ass cheek while he fucks me with the dildo. “You want to feel a fat, swollen head brushing that sweet spot of yours… Deep down.”

“Fuck fuck *fuck*…” I whimper, everything inside me winding and winding. My whole body is coiled up, the pleasure and sensation inside building me closer and closer.

The feel of Colson’s hard dick rubbing on my skin, his warmth covering me as he writhes into me from behind, breathing his dirty words at the nape of my neck… It’s all too much. I’m about to shatter.

Colson pulls the dildo all the way out, then shoves it back in. “I bet your ass is so warm.” He does it again, drawing out completely, then sliding back in. “And tight.” He keeps doing it this way, stealing every ounce of breath from my lungs when I lose that fullness, only to get it back, hard and deep. “Look at how tight you are taking this fake dick…” His voice is hushed with wonder. “Your sweet little ass wants it… So so bad, Cy.”

“*Mmmfuckyeaa*…” I have barely any idea where I am right now. I’m wrapped up in a rainbow. *This feels so fucking good.*

Nothing has ever felt this… fucking…

“Good!” I gasp when he shoves back in this time, because it’s hotter and… it feels thicker.

“*Fuuuck*, Cy… Jesus fucking Christ…” Colson licks and bites the nape of my neck.

Something fizzles in my brain, turning my consciousness back on. My eyes peel open as I turn my face to the side… And I spot the dildo.

The dildo is on the bed next to us.

But something is inside me…

Something is driving into my ass.

I feel Colson’s skin push against my ass cheeks when he thrusts, and my heart thumps heavy in my chest.

Worry takes me over as I grip the comforter in my fist. “Col… you’re not… Are you?”

I can barely form sentences because my breath is being pumped out of my body.

I’m being fucked… for *real*. Not just by a dildo controlled by his hand, but by an actual body.

His body.

“Colson… we can’t…” His dick lashes my prostate and *holy fuck* it feels a million times better than the dildo. “*God*… Jesus, what’s happening…?”

I cry into my comforter, hoarse and crumbling apart as the much longer, thicker, and just overall better in so many ways dick swoops into my body. My ass clenches on him and precum pulses out of me.

“Shh… don’t worry about it, baby.” Colson sucks the words on my neck and earlobe. His hands grip my hips, treasuring in his need as he works his thrusts, pounding into me from behind, riding my ass. His *real* cock is in my ass and I’m about to explode. “It feels euphoric, doesn’t it?”

“Yes!” I sob, arching and giving him my ass to fuck.

And he does. He keeps going, both of us growling and grunting like animals. Because that’s what we are. At this point, it’s a primal instinct, avoiding all social conscience or notion of right and wrong.

It’s deeply physical, our souls coming together… inevitably.

“You feel so damn good, gorgeous,” he tells me, my heart soaring out from behind my ribs. “You’re better than anything I could have dreamt up.”

I’m about to snap in half when his hand comes up to hold my throat. And his teeth sink into the flesh of my shoulder.

The sting of pain, and the burn of his fingers cutting off my oxygen send me soaring, plummeting over the edge of my orgasm like I just dove off a cliff.

I shudder a hoarse wail into my bed, trying not to be too loud, but then completely unable to help it as my dick bursts in a climax so hard it’s almost painful. My balls seize up and long, aching contractions throb from my dick, all over the bed.

And Colson pushes rougher, *deeper*, biting me so hard I know he’s drawing blood.

It keeps my orgasm going for what feels like hours.

Until he croaks on my skin, “I’m coming, Cy. I’m coming in your ass, baby.”

“Please please please... yes.”

And I feel his dick pulsing inside me, filling me up the way only a real one can.

I’m fucking *high*. High up in the sky, looking down on the rest of the world, smirking as I think about how they’ll never understand.

They’ll never know that this is what I have, and it’s perfection.

Mine.

"*Good*," my brother whispers as we both flutter down from the heavens, back into my bed. "Good good, you're so good. And *mine*."

"Only," I breathe.

We stay like this for a long time, until eventually Colson pulls out of me. It feels insane, his body leaving mine.

"We weren't supposed to… do that," I purr, curling up into a ball like a sleepy kitten.

Colson huffs a tiny chuckle, trailing his fingers along my back. "I really didn't have a choice."

My mouth twists into a satisfied grin. "Sure."

"I had to be the one to take your virginity, Cy," he mumbles, then nestles up in front of me. I open my eyes and we lock gazes, a mirror reflection staring back at me.

"Why?"

He blinks at me for a moment, eyes scanning over my face as his fingers trace the lines, down my neck, onto my shoulder, soothing the sore spot he was biting.

Finally, he quietly admits, "So he couldn't take it."

My brows zip. "Who?"

"You know who." His eyes are wide and serious.

Does he mean… Tauren??

What would ever make him think Tauren would take my virginity?

My mind flashes back to his words over the last few months… His jealousy over my obvious crush on Tauren.

That's why we haven't so much as touched each other in what feels like an eternity.

"Col… He's *Mom's husband*," I mutter. "I don't know what you think…" I pause and swallow hard at the severe look he's giving me. "It would never happen."

His silence stretches over the room, blanketing us in unspoken words and suffocating uncertainties.

"He can't take what's mine," Colson whispers, his soft intensity prompting so many feelings.

Inching closer, I ask, "What does this mean, Colson?"

His eyes fall to my mouth, and I see vulnerability in them, the glimmer becoming wider, like a shade that's being lifted slowly, exposing a sliver of

the truth.

But then he clears his throat and backs up. “I’m just saying, don’t let him hypnotize you, Cyrus. I don’t want to have to pick up the pieces when he breaks your heart.”

And with that, he gets up and gets dressed. He goes back to his friends, to his party, leaving me upstairs, alone with our secret.

But this time is different.

Because now I belong to him… fully.

And it’s so wrong how much I fucking love it.

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12

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TAUREN



When I was a little boy, my aunt used to call me a *hero*.

From the time that my mother died until I graduated and went off to college, Sylvia always said I was the hero in my story, searching for my princess to save.

When I was small, my favorite movie was *Robin Hood*. And Sylvia would tell me that someday I'd meet a princess like Maid Marion who needed me. She told me we'd get married, and I'd get to become a king, who lived in a castle with his queen. As I grew and matured, I knew what she was saying was bullshit. Just a comforting story told to a scared little boy who was missing his mother, and searching for something that made him special.

But it worked.

I took a form of that confidence and whimsical expectation into adulthood, always searching for the person to *rescue*; who would turn me from a modest outsider into royalty.

I may have romanticized it in my mind.

The night I met Carla, she looked like she was meant to be a queen. But not just because she's gorgeous in an obvious, almost regal sort of way. It's how she carries herself.

She's not a queen like that of England; she's not the Kate Middleton type.

She's more like Cersai from Game of Thrones. Or the red queen in Alice in Wonderland.

That night, she waltzed up to me, sipping a glass of Chablis and fluttering her long lashes. She placed her hand on my arm, like she wanted to say something to me. So I leaned down.

She asked me my last name. And when I told her, she blinked, then whispered, “Carla Whittle Becker Vance. It’s got a nice ring to it, don’t you think?”

I was floored. It was like she was stepping right into my life at the exact right moment and telling *me* what would happen next. And she was right. Because here we are, five months after our wedding, and she’s reigning over me in exactly the way I knew she would.

I was the epitome of new money when we met. I still am, frankly. And at the time I knew I didn’t have it in me to play the rich eligible bachelor game much longer. Carla fit perfectly into the mold of what I thought my life should look like. The perfect picture I’d been trying to paint since I was six years old, admiring kings and queens. Full, capable families.

I realized early into serious dating, sometime around sophomore year of college, that my priorities were less about the enchanting sense of falling into love than the picturesque concept of it. Like a business decision. Similar to an arranged marriage, in a way. You fall in love with the relationship over the years rather than the far-fetched concept of love at *first sight*. That was why Carla’s proposition on the night we met settled so well with me.

And that’s the part my friends never understood.

Make sure that pre-nup is iron clad, Scott had said.

Yea, and you might as well start putting aside money for therapy now, Brad added.

Truthfully, I didn’t mind. I knew the risks from the start. My prenuptial agreement is, in fact, bulletproof, and I was excited at the prospect of putting to rest the zealousness that’s always lived inside me. I just wanted to rescue my *princess*, get married, and bring a ready-made family into the fold. The money was never an issue, anyway. Knight-Life had been steadily blowing the hell up, and between that and my investments, I could, and can, more than afford Carla’s excessive tastes.

It’s more of the constant boastful brandishing that makes my eye twitch. The way she insists on parading wealth in a way that I never would on my own. It could potentially make me hate her, but I don’t.

Like I said before, I knew what I was getting into. You can't have a messiah complex and then get pissy about it when the people you've opted to save start annoying you.

Right now, though, is an example of the type of night I force myself to float through for the sake of my new family.

Carla and I are attending a benefit for some new cause I honestly can't even remember. I haven't been paying much attention to anything, since these are all Carla's friends, and I only know a few people here. And I don't really like them.

But I play the dutiful, rich husband part, dressed in my expensive suit, shaking hands, talking investments and capital, discussing where we'll be summering based on *so-and-so* having stayed there and raved about it.

As the night wears on, and I attempt to keep my scotch consumption in check, my mind drifts and sifts through all of these people. Memories of others from my past, and the events that have led me to right here, right now, appear like building blocks, stacking up and up and up.

Like the time in high school when I decided I wanted to look up my father…

Sylvia knew some of his information, but she urged me to leave it alone. The thing was, though, that I didn't care if he was a bad guy, or if he turned me away. The not knowing was like a flickering lightbulb in my brain. It was so distracting that even just finding out who he was became an insistent need I couldn't overlook.

I did some research, based on the name and previous address my aunt had given me. And what I found was something that haunts me to this day…

But then again, I'm possessed. *That we know.*

"Babe, have you spoken with Harold and Gemma yet?" Carla's voice cuts into my reverie and I focus to find her staring at me. Her brow furrows. "Are you alright? You're sort of zoning out." She releases a small scoff, as if what's going on around us is so very entertaining, there's no possible *way* someone could keep from being riveted.

"Uh, yea," I grumble, then shake my head. "No, I haven't spoken with them yet. How much longer do you expect we'll be here? I'm kind of tired…"

"It's impolite to leave so close to food service," she scolds with her golden eyes before they soften. "But I suppose we could give it another

thirty minutes?”

I fight desperately against rolling my eyes. *Does that include the extra forty-five minutes it takes you to say goodbye to all your fake friends?*

My lip quirks. “Sure. Sounds good.”

She grins and takes my arm, whisking me away to what’s his name and his wife, who I’m sure have something *very interesting* to say.

And my mind’s eye continues purposely shying away from its hidden corners.



TWO HOURS LATER, we’re home.

The house is quiet, as it always is, since it’s a huge place and there are only four of us here at night. The boys’ Audi is in the driveway, which is a good sign.

I like knowing they’re home and safe when I go to sleep. With Cyrus it’s a given, but Colson’s presence at home isn’t always a guarantee. Getting him to follow any sort of curfew is virtually impossible.

Those two boys… I sigh internally. They’re infinitely different. I’ve known them for the better part of a year, and I still find it fascinating. Their connection, what makes them tick. Them in general.

Lately, my stresses revolve around what will happen when they need to eventually separate. I feel like Cyrus is the last remaining thread holding Colson together. If we snip it, who knows what will happen to the other twin.

“I can’t believe he’s actually home before one,” Carla huffs as we ascend the stairs.

“It’s pretty shocking,” I agree, pushing open the door to the master bedroom and gesturing for her to walk in before me.

We immediately begin our post-night-out ritual of stripping out of our expensive attire and going to our respective activities. I like to shower at night since I usually either work out or get a quick surf in before work in the morning. Whereas Carla simply spends the entire time removing her

layers of makeup, false eyelashes, and whatever other pieces of the puzzle that make up her appearance, like breaking down a stage after the show.

By the time I'm out of the shower and dressed in my sweats, she's in a silk nightgown that allows me to see her nipples, and the fact that she wears no panties underneath.

I'm definitely interested in sex, but I can't be sure if she'll want to, so I leave it to her to make the move. Which she doesn't.

We switch off the lights, Carla takes an Ambien, pulls a sleep-mask over her eyes, and it's *shut-down o'clock.*

In bed, I lie on my back, facing the ceiling for far too long. Now that I'm thinking about it, I am pretty wound up. We haven't had sex in a couple of weeks at this point. And I'm not such an animal to think that I need to have it all the time, but I make efforts and for the most part, they're rebuffed.

Squinting at the white ceiling, I think back to how hot and heavy we were when we first met. Carla would do just about anything I wanted, which must have been part of how easy it was for me to propose. It was like icing on the cake of my strictly practical plan.

And then, sure enough, after the honeymoon, all of that excitement in the bedroom packed up and moved on. I mean, cake is fine without icing. It's… *food*.

That's what this marriage is, after all. It nourishes as necessary. It's *fine*.

And look, I'm not an asshole. I don't expect that just because she's my wife, Carla needs to give it up for me whenever I want. Being married is sort of like a game, one I'm not sure I'm great at playing. I try to tell her how sexy she is all the time, but…

The thing I never let out of the box of my mind any time other than moments like these, when she's snoring next to me and I'm staring up at the ceiling, is that most of the time…

I'm not exactly fighting to have sex with her either.

Carla is a gorgeous woman. I'm not saying I'm not attracted to her. But for me, in order for sex to be *really* exciting, I like there to be some sizzling chemistry involved.

I crave being so swept up in the person and the moment that it feels like you might die if you had to stop. And honestly… I've never really felt that with Carla.

Okay, I definitely haven't.

And now that my thoughts are unleashed, roaming free in the confines of my brain, I'm not so sure I've felt it often at all. I've only ever had two semi-serious relationships, my first girlfriend in high school, Heather, and then the girl I dated in college, Freya. Neither relationship lasted longer than a year or so. And while we definitely fucked—*a lot*—now that I'm thinking about it, I don't remember my life flashing before my eyes when I came.

But whatever. It's not like you *need* mind-blowing, back-arching, toe-curling sex to have a great relationship.

I swallow down the scratchiness of my throat.

Peering over at Carla's sleeping form, I blink, then decide. My mind is made up in a matter of nanoseconds. *I'm going downstairs.*

I crawl out of bed, shrugging my arms into a hoodie and zipping it up. Then I'm off. Tip-toeing the stairs quietly, I slink toward my office.

The room is huge. I had it designed to my exact specifications, knowing I'd be working from home a lot—at least three days a week—and this would become my own little secluded haven. It has everything I could ever want in a room; bookshelves wrapping along three walls, leather couches and a chaise lounge, massive oak desk set up with two computers, giant flatscreen on the wall, fireplace, ping-pong table, full bar, glass doors that look out over the infinity pool and our view of the ocean…

I could go on, but I feel you hating me from here.

Wandering over to the desk, I grab my laptop and bring it to the chaise. I crash onto it with an eager sigh, casually flipping the MacBook open and logging on.

It starts out like any late night down here. Reading emails, checking social media, normal internet activities used to pretend like I'm not about to jerk off.

But then my balls begin to thrum, and I remember how long it's been since I came…

I jerked off a few nights ago. But it was a one-and-done. I pulled up a video on Pornhub and rubbed one out in five minutes, then passed the hell out, like your typical, boring married guy.

Tonight, though… feels different.

Tonight, there's something on my mind. I think it's been trying to pop up for a while, though it's one of those things I purposely avoid thinking about at all costs. A thing I promised myself years ago I wouldn't think

about, because even just *thinking* about it gives it power. And if it gains power, then I'll need to confront it.

God only knows what the hell that would mean.…

However, tonight, the more I try to push it away and avoid it, the louder it's becoming. It's calling to me, vividly in my memories; brightly catching my attention and holding on like a web of Technicolor. A slideshow of images I can no longer ignore flashes through my brain as my eyes flutter closed and I lean back in my seat.

Let go and tumble down into the abyss.

When I was in college, I hooked up with a friend of mine. And yes, he was a man.

I'm not sure if that makes me bisexual, because at the time, I really, *really* enjoyed myself, and I really, *really* enjoy the feeling it gives me when I remember it. But nothing even remotely close to that has happened since, so…

I chocked it up to one of those *everyone experiments in college* scenarios, and left it at that.

But every once in a while, the memories of that night will go from a teeny, tiny voice in the back of my skull that I push away until it lies back down, dormant, to the roar of a lion. Loud and rumbling and insistent, beckoning to me; begging to be fixated on like something too important to ignore for one more second.

So even though I've never considered myself *bisexual* because of this one instance… I think I might be itching to find out if I am. In fact, I think I might be desperately scratching for it.

That's the thought that gleams in my mind like a strobe light while my hand runs over my rapidly growing erection. It throbs in my palm, my balls aching deep as I recall the soft lips and rough stubble, the tender touches of large hands, the erotic dance of firm and hard everywhere, submitting to me and insisting that I drag out his pleasure to get my own.

That's the other part of it that makes this whole thing oh so much more complicated. Not only did I mess around with a guy during that steamy spring night, with vodka on our tongues and mischief in our fingertips…

I did things with him I've never done with any other person. Like… *dominating* things.

Tugging my lip between my teeth, I pull my cock out of my sweats and observe how hard it is. The shine on the tip, the need seeping from me like

it’s calling out for a mouth to catch it…

A man’s mouth.

I was all set to just fool around. It was exciting enough to be doing something I’d never done before with someone I never expected doing it with. But then he asked me to tie his hands behind his back. And it turned into a completely different ballgame.

“Fuck…” I breathe out softly, the memories becoming too much for my balls that are practically vibrating as I reach for my laptop.

Pulling up Pornhub, I immediately go left, away from the default.

I’ve done this before. I won’t lie and say I haven’t, but it isn’t something I allow myself to do all the time. I’m afraid it’ll become a habit.

I’m afraid it’ll begin to define my urges, take hold of my sexuality until I can’t see straight anymore.

And I *have to* see straight. Because I’m married to a woman.

We’ve made no prior agreements about seeing anyone else, or experimenting. I know Carla. She won’t want that.

I’ll have to keep these secret desires locked away; store them for times like these, when I’m alone and pained with need before the glow of my laptop.

I scroll through videos, my eyes wide and eager, searching for something, anything, that could fulfill me right now. Considering how hard my dick is, I don’t think it’ll take much.

I’m already stroking, slowly, just from seeing the thumbnails of the videos… Of two men together, sometimes three. Two dicks…

Or three.

I settle on something I’m barely even paying attention to. I’m far too turned on. I need to focus on not exploding right away, because this is so damn hot. *Why is this so hot?*

Why why why does this turn me on more than anything else?

I blame him.

My friend from college. I refuse to say his name in my mind. I need to keep him faceless. I’m not sure it had anything to do with him, anyway. I think I just wanted to try it with a guy…

And try we did. Everything but actual, dick-in-ass sex. By showtime, he was trussed up and at my mercy, and *Jesus Christ*, has there ever been anything so fantastic? Someone on his knees, mouth open and pleading for me to take control. To give him pain and pleasure, twisted up together like a

braid, entangling our mutual lust and things neither of us had ever explored before.

In my dorm room bed, we touched and licked and sucked, and yes, we were drunk, but who even remembers that part? I couldn't have been that fucked up if I still remember it vividly, twenty years later. I might as well have been stone-cold-sober the way I see these images in my head.

My fist is pumping on my cock while it leaks and leaks on my abs, my sweatshirt now unzipped and hanging open to avoid getting precum on it. What I'm seeing in my brain mirrors what I'm watching on the screen.

Men with men. Sucking cocks and licking balls, muscles pressing together, big hands exploring. Something I could never, ever get from the woman I married, who's passed out above my head.

The second a dick makes it inside an ass, I'm erupting like a shaken soda can.

Pressing my lips together as hard as possible, I stifle the noises that want to escape me, coming down from a spectacular high, unlike anything I've felt in a long, *long* time.

How goddamn *good* it feels leaves me fast, though, replaced by how bad it is. How inconvenient these urges are…

Even if I am bisexual, even if I have this other side of myself, I can *never* act on it. *That was the purpose, after all... Of this marriage.*

To push it away. Keep it hidden, in the dark.

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13

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COLSON



Sometimes I can’t sleep.

Thoughts pile up in my skull, dense and clunky like jagged rocks, until my head is so heavy it wants to snap my neck in half.

They whisper things at me, the thoughts. Plague me with all the insecurities I try desperately to fight on a daily basis.

I don’t deserve happiness. Which is why I’ll never have it.

And I’ll steal it away from anyone who cares about me.

All this bullshit, the stress and the discomfort, the odd pains I’ve been feeling lately and the uncertainty of every aspect of my life weighs and weighs, piling on me until I can’t breathe.

You try sleeping through that.

That’s why I get high, or just drunk enough to put my body down, regardless of how wired my mind may be.

And other times, like now, it’s not enough.

Creeping down the stairs, I go to the kitchen for a Gatorade. I have a mini fridge in my room, but it’s basically empty. *I need to restock.*

Chugging my drink, I leave the empty bottle on the counter and turn to leave. But before I hit the stairs, movement catches my peripheral. Squinting at it, my fingers curl into a fist at my side.

Really, Cy?

Jaw tight, I step slowly, quietly, down the hall toward Tauren’s office. My brother is so invested in what he’s looking at, he doesn’t even notice me.

When I tap him on the shoulder, he practically jumps out of his skin.

“Jesus Christ!” he breathes, as quietly as possible, peeking toward the door, which is open a crack. “You scared me…”

“Hm,” I grunt, peering around him.

The door isn’t open enough for a full view, but still, I can see Tauren across the room, sitting on a chaise lounge with his laptop, jerking it to something on Pornhub.

There’s a serious thump in my pants, and when I realize how loudly my brother is breathing next to me, I turn my eyes on him once more, before allowing them to drop. He uses his hand in an attempt to cover it, but I can still plainly make out his massive erection.

A chuckle leaves my lips. “Creeper.”

“Shut up,” he growls, turning fast and storming away from me.

He scurries with his tail between his legs back to the stairs, and I laugh quietly to myself, taking another peek inside the office. Tauren should really lock his door, or at the very least close it all the way, if he’s going to jerk off in the middle of his office, laptop facing literally anyone who walked by.

Unless… He wants someone to see?

Gulping down my curiosity, I look closely, trying to make out what’s on the screen. It’s all the way across the room, but still… I think I see…

Two guys. *Fucking*.

Gasp! It’s gay porn.

Tauren… watches… gay… porn…?

Now I’m really confused.

My tongue slides over my lower lip while the long, fluid strokes of his hand working on his dick hypnotize me. I’m lulled easily into a trance at the gradual up and down… and up… and down.

He has a big cock. Long and thick… Something to really turn you out.

I force myself to blink and shake it away, teeth setting on edge.

I don’t care about him, and I definitely don’t care about his dick. *Why would I? It’s just a dick. I have one, too, and mine is equally as nice.*

Tauren is nothing but a rich asshole who’s trying to take my brother away from me. Because that’s what he’s doing, isn’t it? Jerking his beautiful dick off with the door open, like some sort of display. He probably *wanted* Cyrus to see him.

He’s playing on Cy’s inner needs… The secret bad stuff that only *I* can give him.

Fuck you, Tauren.

I stomp away from the office, dashing quietly up the stairs. But rather than going to my room, I go to Cy's.

He never locks the door. For me.

It's dark inside his room, but my eyes adjust quickly, and I see him lying in bed, covers pulled up to his shoulders. He's on his side, facing me, and his eyes are closed, but I know he's not asleep.

Maybe he'll pretend, like that time in Oceanside…

My dick grows rigid in my sweats as I step closer to his bed, eyes stuck on his messy black hair and pale skin. We don't look like we belong in California with our complexions and dark hair. We got one hundred percent of our father's Irish and French ethnicity, though Mom is mostly British anyway, so there's really no darkness anywhere in our blood.

We're fucking white, and sometimes it's annoying. *Rich white kids. Just like the rest of them.*

Though, not exactly. Because Cyrus and I are unique. We *do* have something different in us… Something *wicked*.

Reaching out, my fingers trail the line of his jaw. Just like mine. He doesn't flinch. He expects it. Still, his eyes remain shut. But I know how to open them.

"Does he know you watch him?"

As expected, my brother's eyes fling open, and he glowers up at me. "No."

My head cocks. "You sure about that?"

"What are you getting at?" He chews on his lower lip, flinching my cock some more.

"Your crush is kinda cute, good twin." I smirk, tugging his chin. His Adam's apple bobs visibly. "What do you think is gonna happen? One night he'll pull you into a dark corner and shove you to your knees…?" My mouth doesn't say these words, but my mind adds, *Like I do.*

A small breathy whimper escapes Cy's lips and my blood is instantly several degrees hotter. Inching closer to the edge of the bed, I gaze down at him, green meeting green in the dark. My finger traces the seam of his soft lips.

"Only I get this… Right?" My thumb swipes the pouted curve of his lower lip and I feel him shiver. "Remember the last time I pushed inside here?" I shove my thumb between his lips, and he gasps around it.

His warm tongue on my thumb sends me floating. My muscles are tense, but it feels good. This retched pleasure I need so badly. The evil lust that lives inside me I can't help but pray to.

My salvation and damnation, woven up together.

"Cyrus…" I whisper while he sucks my thumb. Gently, hesitantly.

He's always unsure, and I like it. We both know this is *wrong*.

Wrong in italics, because I've never given much thought to conscience.

That wet mouth, the heat on my finger, sucking slowly, just like the first time…

I need that right now. I need it, and he needs it. Whether he also wants to fight it or not.

Yanking my thumb out of his mouth, I kneel on the bed, right before him. I pull my cock out of my sweats and give it a few easy strokes while I watch my brother. Watch him lusting after me…

He's afraid to tell anyone what he likes. He's still not comfortable enough with himself to be open with the world. But it's fine. He doesn't need to open up to anyone else.

Just me. *Mine*.

Cyrus's tongue touches his top teeth. I feel heat coming off him in waves as I my hand grazes down to my nuts, massaging them gently while I push my cock up to his mouth. His lids are heavy as he gazes up at me, parting his lips. Everything is in slow motion as his tongue extends, and he swipes it along the underside of my shaft.

I can't help it. My lashes flutter as I breathe out slowly. *Fuck*, he's just… All I need. Everything.

This bad bad bad… *awful* desire we make together. It's the *only* thing that sustains me.

My brother takes the swollen tip of my dick into his mouth and sucks. It feels so fucking good it fills my limbs with rage. Because if I find out he's done this with someone else, I'll fucking end them. It's entirely irrational, I know. But I can't help it.

I'll leave a trail of dead to ensure Cyrus stays mine.

He takes me deeper, hollowed cheeks, saliva lubing me up for him to suck and suck, desperate in his chase. My fingers comb through his silky hair and I hold on tight, flicking my hips just enough to get a few sexy fucking grunts.

I want to get deeper. I want my balls on his chin while he swallows me all the way down. He's done it before…

Throwing a leg over Cy's chest, I straddle him, forcing him to lie flat on his back while I hold his face. My cock surges back into his sweet mouth, and he whips the blanket off himself, sucking me while fisting his erection inside his pajamas.

I turn over my shoulder to watch, while spearing his throat with all of my erection. He's jerking himself hard, whining on my cock. When my eager gaze comes back to his face, his eyes are watering, spit flowing from his mouth. It looks uncomfortable, but I know it's not.

I know he likes this. I know he thinks about it all the time…

"You like when I fuck your mouth, good twin?" I rasp from above him, flicking my hips with his rampant sucking.

He nods frantically. Then his eyelids droop and he groans on me.

Something pings in my mind while I watch him carefully. The way he's worshipping my cock…

He's not picturing Tauren, is he?

No, there's no way. Cyrus loves sucking my dick.

Or he just loves dick, and yours is the closest.

My teeth grind together, and I smack his hand away from his erection. His eyes flit open.

"No touching," I rumble, riding his mouth harder, holding his face when he tries to move back. "You can come just from getting me off, I know you can."

He tries to shake his head, but I won't let him. I hold him harder.

"You're not getting away from me, Cy," my voice snaps as I near orgasm. The wet warmth enveloping my erection, the look in his eyes…

The sight of myself sucking my own dick. It's sick. And that's my precious burden.

"Next time you think about wanting Tauren, just remember the honeymoon… What I took. It's mine now, baby."

His eyes round, then they droop shut. His throat relaxes while the rest of him tenses. Peering over my shoulder again, I watch his cock flinching on his abs, only half visible from inside his pants. It's stretched shiny and so very excited, precum leaking from the tip.

I bite my lip, pushing and pulling between his lips until I crack right down the middle.

“Uhh… yesss…” I groan in the quietest whisper I can manage while pulses of cum blow from my cock, filling his mouth.

Our eyes lock together, and he whines, throat adjusting to swallow every drop. I pull my cock from his mouth, dragging the wet, tender head along his lower lip. My breathing is unsteady while we watch each other. Cy’s tongue sneaks out to graze me, then his eyes roll back and he gasps.

My face flings around once more to watch as cum shoots from his long, perfect cock. No touching. No provocation other than me coming in his perfect fucking golden boy mouth.

This is all we’ll ever need, just me and him. *No one will take this from me.*

Not Dad, not Mom, not Dr. Roberts or UCLA or fucking *Tauren*. I’ll burn the world down before I give up my brother.

Sliding down his body, I lap up the cum from his abs, tasting him before coming back to his mouth. And I kiss him, wet and sloppy, trading his cum for mine, tongues tangling, breaths echoing.

“No one else, good twin,” I rumble to him, yanking his hair in my fist.

He nods, fingers tracing my jaw. “I couldn’t… bad twin.”



MY HEAD IS ALL SCATTERED.

School is bullshit today, as usual. I’m close to failing biology and history, but the teachers have given up on even sending letters home. I’m sure they’d love to flunk me, but they won’t. They want to get me the hell out of this school, not keep me here for another year.

It’s not my fault I don’t care about the things they’re trying to shove down my throat. Even my music class is bullshit. Mr. Wynne pisses me off. He thinks he knows everything.

No one knows *everything*.

I coast through the day feeling like garbage. My stomach hurts and my eyes will barely stay open. I keep dozing off and all the teachers are getting pissed. But I can’t help it… My focus is stuck on memories… Like last

night, for example. Catching Cyrus watching Tauren jerk off, then slipping into my brother's bedroom like a bad dream.

It had been a few months before last night, and I won't admit that I missed it. And I *really* won't admit that I know it's Tauren's fault we don't sneak around as much anymore.

When Tauren showed up, everything changed. It's fucking annoying. I don't need a father, and I definitely don't need a father *figure* trying to take the only good piece of my heart away.

Fuck this shit.

After school, we go to the abandoned house by the highway. We smoke and skate. And when I have the perfect amount of buzz going on, I land a varial kick flip coming out of the pool. It's gnarly as hell, and I'm pretty psyched.

The guys are jamming outside as the sun sets, and Annabelle drags me into the house. It's dark in here, vines and weeds growing on everything, rock crumbling from the walls. I kinda like it.

She pulls me around a corner, then shoves me against the wall. "I need it, Col," she breathes over my mouth. "*Please*."

Before I can even react, she's kissing me, shoving my hand down the front of her shorts. My fingers hit slippery wetness, and it throws me off.

Swallowing feels like sandpaper while I focus on kissing her back, her warm breath tasting like the Fireball we've been drinking as her tongue glides into my mouth. She smells like flowers, as usual. But for some reason, it's tripping me up.

My pulse is gaining speed as I wrap her hair around my fist, growling into her mouth while my fingers push inside, desperate to find some traction for my arousal. Anna's palm covers my dick, her movements slowing.

"Is everything okay?" she purrs on my lips.

My chest is heaving as I grunt, "Fucking fine. Shut up."

She's not fazed by my asshole tendencies, and moves her mouth down to my neck, licking slow lines, then moving up to suck on my earlobe.

That usually helps me out, but right now, it's not working. My dick isn't responding to any of this. I think I'm too deep in my bullshit thoughts. This happens sometimes, and I need to just fake it until it works.

Get hard. Come on, come on. She's wet. She wants you to fuck her.

My head is all fuzzy while I push her shorts down and pull my dick out, grinding myself into her body.

Too soft. Too supple. I fight away those thoughts while I stroke my cock, trying to get it hard enough to fuck.

Her tits are brushing on my chest and it's distracting as fuck, so I shove her away and flip her around. Pushing her into the wall, I lift her enough to get my barely hard cock up to her ass.

This is good. When in doubt, go in from behind.

I should really use a condom, but I'm too busy forcing myself to get hard enough to fuck my girlfriend. Nudging the head up to her wet pussy from behind, I breathe unsteadily while gripping her ass.

It's too curvy… *Not enough muscle.*

"Shut up," I growl at my own brain.

"Huh?" she whispers in between heavy breaths.

"Nothing." I push into her slowly and she whines.

"Oh God, Col… You feel so good."

"Mm… yea. This is good." My eyes squeeze shut, and I picture things that will get me there.

I imagine there's a hard dick on the other side of this body, and if I wanted to, I could grab it right now.

My balls tighten and my cock swells. *There you go.*

Forget about the soft whines of this hairless creature, the spiderwebs you can feel on your arm and the fact that your stupid friends are ten feet away.

Just fuck and get it over with.

I pump into Annabelle, gradually gaining speed with my eyes closed. The problem is I'm not drunk enough. I have no issue screwing my girlfriend when I'm loaded. But when I'm even partially sober, my mind always runs away.

It's just the way I am. Not everything has to *mean* something.

Pushing and pulling into the silky wetness of Anna's pussy feels good, in an obvious kind of way. But I'm aware, vaguely, at the edges of my mind, that she's not…

Nope. Stop it.

Stop thinking about him.

The dance of his fingers on my jaw from last night are fucking me up. My teeth grind and I pound into Anna harder, determined to prove that I want her, not him.

I'm not gay.

Just because I love my brother more than I'll ever love anyone else, and I do things for him I'd never do with anyone else, doesn't mean I like other dudes.

I don't look at guys in gym class and notice things about their bodies. *I don't.*

Shut up.

My eyes squeeze shut harder as sweat trickles down my temple. I'm trying, I'm fucking struggling to stay focused, but I can't stop remembering…

The honeymoon.

God, it was good. Why was that so fucking good?

Why am I thinking about that when I'm up to my nuts in a fuckhot girl who's screaming my name?

My muscles are straining and tired, just like my brain is. I'm suddenly so fucking exhausted I might fall down.

Draping myself over Anna's back, I kiss the back of her neck and rumble that I'm gonna come… Faking it. She cries to me that she's coming too… Probably also faking it.

I'm so done with this fake shit.

Pulling out of her fast, I jerk myself and spit on her lower back. Hopefully, she thinks it's cum. Annabelle's kinda ditzy, so she doesn't say anything or ask questions. I rip the sleeve off my t-shirt and use it to wipe up my *cum*.

Ridiculous.

My head is spinning while we exit the creepy run-down house. And instead of sitting down with my boys to play for a bit, I mutter, "I'm out."

And I leave.

I'm annoyed, tense, and frustrated as I drive home. I'm not sure what the hell is wrong with me, but I know it's a lot. I'm basically a giant clusterfuck of a human being. And apparently, it's only getting worse.

When I get inside the house, I hear Cyrus laughing. It thumps my heart hard behind my ribs, but I ignore it, and scold it.

Stop reacting that way.

I hate this constant inner battle I have with myself. I hate that sometimes I'm up, and other times I'm so far down I couldn't possibly dig myself out. *I hate how much my stomach hurts right now.*

Lingering outside the kitchen, I glare around the corner to watch them. Tauren and Cyrus are in there, talking about some book they both read. They're such nerds.

It's irritating to me that they both like all the same things. I don't like anything that Cyrus likes. Because he likes nerdy shit.

That's why he's always on Tauren's nuts. They're both dorks.

"That's so true, though." Tauren grins, pulling a tray out of the microwave. "I hadn't thought about it like that."

"I'm telling you." Cy's smile is beaming as Tauren hands him a fork, and they both dig into a pan of what looks like leftover enchiladas. "It's crazy overrated. There are so many better books out there on the subject."

"Did I tell you I'm rereading *Dune*?" Tauren mumbles through his bites.

"No!" Cyrus lights up. "Buddy read?"

Tauren chuckles and nods. "Hell yea." He gives Cy a side-look. "Can you catch up?"

I can feel Cyrus flushing and shivering from all the way over here while he gazes at our stepfather, something I've never seen before in his eyes. He sucks his bottom lip for a split second, disguising it as if he's lapping up food before he nods and whispers, "Definitely."

Am I the only person seeing this??

They're flirting out in the open! I mean, come on. It's so obvious.

I used to think it was one-sided. Cyrus's blinding obsession with Tauren he's had since the day we met Mr. Perfect. But after what I witnessed last night…

Tauren watching gay porn…

Is he into dudes? Could Tauren be looking at my brother, too?

The thought has me storming away, up the stairs to my bedroom. Once inside, I start grabbing shit and throwing it all over the place. I'm roaring, raging as I whip books and papers and magazines in every direction.

I don't care if it makes no sense. Cyrus is *mine*.

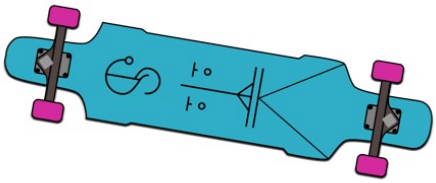
No one is fucking taking him from me… Not even the guy with the dented armor.

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14

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CYRUS



I ’ve always loved living in SoCal.

Maybe it’s just because I’m from here… I was born and raised right here in Southern California. And yes, I’ve been to other places. But still, I consider us to be the superior coast.

I’m sure others would disagree, but how can you argue with perfect weather all the time? The most beautiful beaches and captivating sceneries. I know there are things about our state that leave much to be desired, like the earthquakes and wildfires, droughts, the crippling taxes and often obnoxiously vain people. But Cali is my home, and I truly enjoy being here.

Like today. Right now. Shining example.

We’re having our rec class outside, and it’s super nice out, as usual. The sun is shining on my face and arms while I walk the track. A few classmates sprint past me, and my eyes linger on them for a moment, before peeking left at the kids playing basketball. Then right at the guys doing push-ups and pull-ups on the bars.

I’ll just stick to my walking.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m an active person. I like to keep in shape, but we have pretty decent metabolisms in our family. At least, at our age. Colson and I have diesel appetites, but we really don’t gain weight. That said, we’re both active, we just prefer not to work out in rec class in front of everyone else like it’s a contest.

When Dad bought us the skateboards, we were only eight. He doesn’t skate, nor does he know anything at all about the sport. I think he was just looking for an activity to keep us busy; something he thought would be

good for *boys*. We ended up unsupervised, left to teach ourselves how to use them. Surprisingly, neither of us ever broke anything.

Colson is the fearless one, with his vertical rigamarole. I prefer to just cruise. I can ollie, kick-flip, heel-flip, grind and board-slide, but I rarely ever do it. Skating is relaxing to me; hopping on the longboard and weaving around the streets. I can stay in my thoughts, like I always seem to be. No one breathing down my neck…

Why are you so quiet?

What's wrong?

You should talk more!

Maybe that's why I like the library so much, too. No one expects you to be chatting about nonsense; they don't question you when you want to just sit quietly.

Since when did being quiet become a terminal disease, anyway??

My gaze slides, like it's magnetized, to my brother. This and Spanish are the only classes we share. It's kind of good…

I think being in class with Colson would definitely take the comfort out of it.

Right now, he's off by the bleachers, talking and laughing with his friends. Mr. Brown doesn't seem to care that they're not participating. But I mean… It's rec class. That and the fact that we're about two weeks from graduating makes it sort of a *who gives a crap* situation, I guess.

Annabelle is in this class with us… Colson's *girlfriend*. My eyes set on her while I walk at a zombie pace. She's pretty, if you like that sort of thing. *Girls, I mean…*

She's also blonde, has big boobs, and long legs always on display in short shorts or mini-skirts. It's weird, but she kind of reminds me of Mom… with the blonde hair and all. Fake attitude.

I wonder if Colson has ever thought that. *Probably not.*

I don't know Anna well, but I know that Colson doesn't seem to pay her all that much attention. It's probably what makes her chase him more… His perpetual indifference.

Colson's been hooking up with girls since the first hair sprouted underneath his arms. While I was playing video games and reading comics, he was out grabbing boob. The sex stuff has always come easier to him than me, like most things regarding normal human interaction. He's loud and funny and people like to be around him, when he's not scaring the shit out

of them, that is. But that might be part of it, too. The *mystery*. People's endless need to get close to the bad boys.

And my brother's as bad as they come.

A little frisson sweeps through my gut, the same one I'm always forcing away. *The other night was wild…*

Here's another interesting tidbit of information while we're lost in our thoughts; Colson's never so much as looked at another guy here in school. At least, as far as I know.

He's *straight*.

And yet, when we're alone in my bedroom… The things we do together are very *not* straight.

They're also very not *legal*.

On the inside, we're always together. *Entwined*. Sometimes when we look at each other, when our green eyes lock, I can feel him inside me. It's been like this for as long as I can remember, but after he took my virginity —stole it, like a thief in the night—it grew stronger. It became a physical sensation, not just a metaphor.

I remember exactly how it felt to have him inside me, every single nuance of his body overtaking mine, it sticks out in my brain, as easy as remembering my own name. Even though it hasn't happened again since *the honeymoon*.

My eyes flit to my brother again as I come around the track for the fifth time. He's writing something on the underside of one of the bleachers in Sharpie while Annabelle talks to him, twirling a strand of hair around her finger. It doesn't even look like he's listening to her, which he probably isn't.

Then his gaze flings in my direction, landing right on me. He stares, and my muscles get all bunched up remembering how he looked at me the other night… While he was coming in my mouth.

My breathing shallows and my dick pumps between my thighs.

"Hey, Cy." An unfamiliar male voice breaks me out of my reminiscence, and I almost trip over my own feet.

My head quirks. It's Carey Culliver. He's one of the openly gay kids here at Solana Prep. But we don't talk. So I have no clue why he's doing so to me right now…

"Hi, Carey," I answer him as normally as possible. "How's it going?"

He shrugs while falling into step by my side. “Same old bullshit. Only a couple more weeks and we’re outta this place for good, though. Pretty awesome, right?”

I give him a sort of side-look and nod, still skeptical of why he’s engaging me in conversation. He’s kind of cute, but I’ve always refused to look at him because I’m terrified that extended eye contact will give him the green light to approach me. Or that it will spill my secrets to any onlookers.

And yes, I sound like a paranoid weirdo, and no, it’s not a problem to be gay at all. But I’m still just… scared.

Guys like Carey seem so *sure*. Sure of who they are, and who they want. He’s not one of the louder gays in school, meaning he’d be more my type, I suppose. But also, just being gay doesn’t mean I’ll immediately be attracted to every other gay guy. And even if I’m looking to him more as a friend or ally than a boyfriend, it still frightens me to think about taking that leap. Even if everyone around me can tell, which my ever-present paranoia tells me they can… I’m just not *ready*.

Okay??

God, I’m not ready! Everyone get off my back!

I’m really fumbling around inside as Carey says, “So a bunch of us are hanging out Friday night, and we were wondering if you’d like to come?”

My face springs in his direction, and I gawk at him like he’s insane. “Me?”

Carey chuckles, dimples like craters appearing at the corners of his mouth. It’s kind of sexy… “No, your twin. Yes, *you*, Cyrus.”

“Well… I mean, most people want to hang out with Colson, not me,” I mutter, rubbing the back of my neck while my eyes dart in my brother’s direction. I almost stumble over my feet again.

He’s already watching me. Or rather *glaring* in my direction, eyeing Carey like he’s about to kidnap me.

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re both cute.” Carey’s brows lift, then he bursts out laughing. “But no, we want to hang out with you, darling.”

My forehead lines. “Why me? And who’s *we*?”

“Myself, Travis, Dom, Victor, Josh R. And Josh P.” He smiles at me while I blink in surprise. *Josh P. is gay?? Interesting.*… “You’d fit in with us if you wanted, but you’re too quiet. We think you should come out of your shell a little before graduation. Don’t you agree?”

My brain won’t stop lingering on the words *come out* as I stare at his angled face. His chocolate brown eyes matching his hair, swept back with a few strands hanging in his face. He looks like the first gay Disney prince.

The wheels in my mind are turning as we walk the track, and I can feel the eyes of my brother at my back. A chill brushes over my exposed skin.

Carey pokes me in the side, and I flinch. “Come on, Cyrus. Have some fun.” He leans in closer to my ear. “You know you want to…”

The chill intensifies. I’m not really sure if I do *want to*.

It might be cool to have friends who share my same sexual preferences. But then, just because they also like dick, doesn’t mean we’ll have anything else in common. I have a few friends who like the same stuff as me; science and reading and graphic novels. We hang out on rare occasion, but mainly, I like being alone because other people are just too much.

I sound like a fucking hermit. Jesus, I need to get a life.

I nod slowly at Carey, making sure to back away from him since I know Colson is watching and I can only imagine what he’ll say, or do, about this. “I’ll think about it and let you know.”

Carey smiles, and it’s kind of pitying, but we won’t focus on that right now. “Sure thing, sweetheart. DM me.”

He winks and then scampers off to wherever he came from, while I let out a long breath, as covertly as possible.



WHEN I’M DONE with science club, Colson is nowhere to be found, so I skate home.

Stepping inside the house, I prop my longboard by the door, my head doing its usual bounce back and forth while I look for someone. Typically, Mom or…

Tauren.

Before I even swing around the corner into the kitchen, I know he’s in there. Mom only comes into the kitchen to bark things at the help or grab a juice from the fridge. Even her wine is kept elsewhere. So when I come

home to shuffling noises in the kitchen, it usually means that my stepdad is cooking.

And sure enough, when I peek into the room, I find him plopping a big slab of meat onto a tray. My cheeks flush instantly.

I watched him jerking off two nights ago. *Yea.*

That happened.

Not that I'd forgotten about it, but after Colson swooped in and distracted me the way he always does, I misplaced my awkwardness.

"Cy! Good, you're here." Tauren's rumbling voice makes me jump. "Come help me."

"S-sure thing," I stutter, mentally scolding myself.

But now I seem to have located it.

I move cautiously into the room, as if my perverse thoughts will be visible the closer I get to him. Tauren is just jaunting around, grabbing bottles of sauce and spices, and I'm watching him. Remembering his hand moving up and down the many, many inches of his erection.

I tug my lip between my teeth.

"Earth to Cy!" Tauren chuckles, and I shake myself out of it, tentatively allowing my eyes to find his. "I asked you how school was."

"Oh," I croak, then clear my throat. "It was good."

Tauren stops what he's doing and gives me a look, a brow only a shade or two darker than his shiny bronze hair lifted in skepticism. His mouth is still curled in slight amusement, and I'm used to it.

I always tell him all about my school day, just like he always tells me all about his workday. Honestly, we have a great relationship. We talk a lot, and we get along well. Mom started calling us *two peas in a pod*, but I hate it when she does, because it tends to give Colson a look that's stabbier than usual.

The only problem with my friendly relationship with Tauren is that I'm sure he's viewing me as a *son*, and I'm looking at him like he's someone I'd pray a sacrifice to the gay god—at this point, I think that's Lil Nas X—to get a taste of.

It's a really inappropriate way to look at your mom's husband. But seriously, the way he fills out those button-down dress shirts is fucking *lethal*. I dare any human not to fall into the spell of that body and those eyes, and that mouth…

“I’m on chapter fifteen of *Dune*…” I mumble in an attempt to distract him—and myself—from my obsessive ogling, which I can only *hope* is remaining discreet.

Tauren’s eyes light up. And something blooms in my chest.

He steps closer to me. My pace picks up while my breathing simultaneously stops.

He angles his chin to look down at me over the barely-inch that separates us, and that masculine scent he carries envelopes my senses. *I’m going to goddamn fall down.*

“You’re something else, you know that?” he says softly, and it’s active work not reaching out to run my fingers up the V of his open collar. “Fastest reader in the West.”

He grins and winks, reaching behind me for a grinder of Himalayan pink salt. Then he turns and goes back to his tray of food, picking it up and carrying it toward the backdoor. Leaving me fused to the kitchen counter like a shivering buffoon.

I finally let out the breath I’d been holding, my eyes stuck on the direction he just disappeared. *Fuck me.* How is it humanly possible to feel this much tension in the presence of another person? I suppose it’s similar with Colson, but then it’s also different. Colson feels like he belongs inside me.

With Tauren, I just really, *really* want him there.

“Cy! Come on, man,” he shouts from outside and I flinch. “It’s grillin’ time, baby!”

I scrub a hand over my heart. *Baby.*

Rolling my eyes at my own incessant swooning, I storm after him, hating myself more with each step.

Unrequited love is really just the worst.

As unnecessarily large as our house is, I must admit the outdoor space is pretty amazing. This house actually isn’t as gaudy as the house we grew up in, but it’s equally as huge and mesmerizing. Sitting on a crest that overlooks the ocean, we have access to our own private half-mile stretch of beach. Not to mention the veranda, infinity pool, elaborate barbecue enclosure with tiki bar, and a pool house almost the same size as Aunt Lily’s house in Oceanside.

It’s an incredible place, and as I gaze out over the palette of sunset colors and calm waves, I have to acknowledge how *hashtag blessed* I am. I

don’t like taking things for granted. I read a lot and I watch the news, meaning I know exactly how much more I have than about ninety-nine percent of the population.

Sometimes it makes me feel like shit… Knowing I have so much and people who probably deserve it more struggle every damn day.

I’m not saying I don’t struggle. I definitely do… But my struggles are interior. The pain I experience is from the fact that my soul is defective.

All the good in the world wouldn’t make up for the bad that lives inside me.

“Cyrus! Focus, man.” Tauren’s voice snaps me out of my wallowing, and I flinch. “I need your hands. Can you do the corn please?”

Biting my lip, I wander closer to him, secretly holding my breath when I reach his side, so as not to allow that delicious smell to enter my nostrils again. *And I ain’t talkin’ about the steaks.*

While Tauren fiddles with three giant T-bones, I place the tin foil packet containing four ears of corn slathered in garlic butter and seasonings onto the top grate, minding the heat suddenly blooming around me. Thing is, I can’t tell if it’s from the grill or the general hotness of the man standing next to me.

When I believe the coast to be clear, I glance at Tauren, using the corner of my eye to admire him in secret. I really hate that I crush on him so hard, but if there’s one thing I’ve learned over the last many years of my life, it’s that trying to force things away usually only makes them stronger. *Unfortunately, I have a lot more experience in this topic than I’d like to…*

So for now, here I sit; wading in the neck-high waters of my obsession with my stepfather, knowing damn well nothing will ever come from it. Nothing *good*, anyway.

Sigh. I’m doomed to drown slowly in lust for people I can’t have.

Contending to force it away, my mind betrays its efforts and drifts to Colson. I wonder what he’s doing. If he’s with Annabelle. If he’s touching her, or kissing her… Or fucking her.

If it feels the same way for her that it does for me when he…

“You okay, kid?” The deep voice rumbles at my right and my head springs in its direction. “You seem more distracted than usual.”

Blinking at him, I take in the concern on his face, and it gives my chest warmth it shouldn’t have. *He’s concerned as a father, not a boyfriend, dumbass.*

“Uh, I’m fine,” I respond, going stiff when his arm brushes mine. My eyes fall to the muscular bicep, and my mouth waters. “I’m just… thinking.”

“You been doing alright at school?” His effervescent blue eyes linger on me, etched in a deep care I could fool myself into thinking *more* of, though it’s strictly platonic, and I need to *stop*. “I mean, like, with the other kids. No one’s… messing with you or anything. Right?”

The look he’s giving me is intense. There’s a quiet fury lining his features, dancing along the edge of his gaze. Like he’s truly angry at the thought of kids at school messing with me. It brings a heated tightness up my chest… Until I realize once more that he’s only being protective as a *stepfather*.

This does not need to be romanticized the way my foolish and clearly misguided limbic system is reacting. Anxiety is building up quick in my chest from these factors.

My desperate crush on my stepfather, thinking about Colson and his girlfriend, Tauren’s concern for me and all my *many* issues, him standing so close and staring at me like that…

It’s all *too much*.

I chew nervously on my lip, eyes falling away in discomfort.

Colson must have told him why he got suspended before the wedding. I’m not sure how that would have come about. It’s not like my brother confides in Tauren...

They probably brought it up in the meeting with Granger. The fact that Colson beat the snot out of that asshole Perry Kelso for messing with me. And now I really feel like a kid; an insignificant *child* who’s being bullied at school so badly his stepdad is worried about him.

Ugh.

I hate this feeling. I absolutely despise it. I’m a man, for fuck’s sake. I’m going to be eighteen in a matter of weeks. I’m tall, I have muscles. I look exactly like Colson does. When will everyone stop treating me like an expensive piece of equipment? Like a brain in a jar that needs to be protected at all costs.

These people have no idea the kinds of things I live with. The strength it takes to hold myself together.

I’m *not* delicate.

But rather than admitting such crippling truths to the sexy older man next to me, I just force one of my *everything is fine* smiles and nod. “Yea, everything is fine.” I glance up at him. “Valedictorian-ready.”

His smile returns, and it’s a dazzling one. “Good… Good. I’m here if you need anything.” He slaps a strong hand onto my shoulder and squeezes.

I have to look at the ground again, and take in a deep breath before I get a hard on, or need my inhaler.

My own stepdad makes me more breathless than asthma ever has. Where are the corticosteroids for that sort of affliction??

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15

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TAUREN



The Knight-life office is in Silicon Valley.

We’re still in the relatively smaller space we started with years ago. This business, this startup… For all the traction it’s gotten over the last couple of years, it still feels like the early stages of our come-up. And we like it that way.

Of course, we have employees now, offices and benefits and weekly meetings, most of which we hold via Skype, so we can all stay in our respective mansions while we talk business. But we like to remember where we came from, because we quite literally came from nothing.

Today, however, we’re in the office for an important meeting with some publishers and their tech people, to discuss a few new adaptations that will help us garner books faster and give our users the content we know they’re into.

I love having the ability to make shit fancy, but still, I keep our Amazon agreements close to my chest. A passion project of mine—within the passion project that Knight-life already is—is my desire to work mainly with independent authors; writers who self-publish, through Amazon and a few smaller sources.

The indie publishing movement blew up over the last decade, but more so in the last five years, and I just know that within the scattered weeds of over-saturation, there are mounds of gold. Hidden gems, undiscovered and a million times more valuable than the bread-and-butter authors and content the traditional publishing houses tend to pick up.

That's what I'm going for, and even though they know it's a risk, my partners are on board. It's just a matter of finding the best avenues to locate these diamonds in the rough.

After the meeting, we adjourn to our rec room, which is basically just a spot where we hang out and brainstorm. Really, it's a cool-as-shit room with a pool table, a bar, and our own personal fully stocked snack shack. *How very Silicon Valley of us.*

Scott and Brad are drinking while we play pool, but I'm more interested in keeping my head clear. I want to get home before sunset and surf. The waves today are supposed to be perfect.

And of course, because this is my life lately, I'm on my second bite of a rather delicious Mediterranean wrap when the berating begins.

"So, Vance," Scott, the snarkier of the two, says while he lines up to sink his shot, "bored with that *Real Housewife* of yours yet?"

Brad snickers as my unamused glower aims in his direction.

"I don't know what you're insinuating," I mumble after a swallow.

"Yes, you do," he counters, making a play for the side-pocket. Which he misses.

"He's talking about that decision you made to marry someone you were only *meh* about in order to prove once and for all that you're the savior of the So-Cal entitled white female population." Brad moves up for his shot, gifting me a smirk that inches an icky feeling up my esophagus.

"I thought you guys were supposed to be my friends. Jesus," I mutter, poking at my sandwich. "It's like you *want* my marriage to fail." My gaze narrows in their direction. "Maybe we're jealous?"

Scott cackles as Brad sinks his shot, then moves up for his next turn. "No thanks, baby V. I'd rather donate to charity. At least that way I know my money is going to people who actually deserve it."

"Ugh…" *My appetite is gone.*

Brad misses and steps back. "What our ever-so-supportive friend here is trying to ask is, how are things with Carla?"

"Things are fine." I sigh, fingering my hair. It doesn't matter what I say, they won't believe me, regardless.

They know me too well.

"Which is Tauren-speak for I'm bored as fuck and regretting this stupid decision my best friends advised against," Scott sings, then shoots. His ball goes sailing into the corner-pocket.

I straighten in my seat. “Not that you morons would understand this, being unmarried bachelors and all, but it’s normal for the relationship to settle and smooth out a bit once the honeymoon phase is over.”

They both look up at me.

“You’ve been married for six months.” Brad’s eyebrow quirks.

“Yea… so??” I let out a stubborn huff. “Sometimes it happens sooner. It’s no big deal.”

Scott misses his next shot, then blinks at me. “Vance, all we’re trying to say is that we want you happy.” He taps his fingers on the edge of the table before Brad pushes him out of the way.

“Yea, and we hope you can find that with your wife,” Brad adds, elbowing Scott as he rolls his eyes.

“Well, I *am* happy.” I force the words out. “So, like I told you on my wedding day, thanks for the vote of fucking confidence, but I’m fine. Now, can we please talk about something else?”

The two of them share a look before coming back to me, nodding slowly, like robots who forgot their fucking manners.

I’m sick of this conversation. It’s always the time with these two. They think just because they’re my best friends it gives them the right to come down on me about my ill-advised marriage.

And yes, part of me knows they’re right. It’s just a fact that I was never head-over-heels in love with Carla, and I always saw our marriage as a way to insert myself into a lifestyle I thought I wanted.

Whatever. That doesn’t mean it’s *bad*. It’s just… different.

Who’s to say every relationship needs to be all sparks and fireworks and undeniable, unquenchable need? Rich, illustrious desire all the time…

That sounds like a headache, anyway.

My phone buzzes in my pocket while the two goons are arguing over whether Scott moved his ball with his finger. I pull it out of my pocket and find a new text from the wife in question.

Carla: Going on a spa retreat with the girls this weekend in Malibu. You’re home to watch the boys, right?

I won’t admit it to anyone. If you ask me, I’ll deny it tooth and nail.

But reading this text clenches my jaw so hard my teeth hurt.

“That was her, wasn’t it?” Scott asks, and when I glance up at him, he’s smirking. “Let me guess, she’s spending some exorbitant amount of money on something completely selfish and unnecessary?”

I suck in a long stream of air and pinch the bridge of my nose. “Shut up.”



THE WAVES TODAY WERE, indeed, perfect.

I was able to get home with a couple of hours to ride them before sunset. It was killer, and as I’m walking back up the path to the house from the beach, I’m bathed in color. The pinks, oranges, and yellows melt together, reminding me of how much I love it here.

Despite anything I may be feeling about my marriage, just living in this gorgeous house, on this even more gorgeous stretch of beach is enough to settle my inner turmoil. From the moment my business took off, all I’ve wanted was someone to share my success with. And I’ve found it.

It’s not just about Carla, after all. I have the boys to think about. And as odd as it may seem, I definitely feel like I’m closer to them than I am to her.

The more I think about Colson, and how he’s such a hard nut to crack, the more I think he just needs someone to put him in his place. I’ve never been a *disciplinarian*, per se, but if going toe-to-toe with him is how I’ll curb his rampant restlessness, then I think I can manage it. Who knows? It might even be fun.

If Colson is the challenge, then Cyrus is the reward. Talking to him is as easy as breathing for me. There’s a kinship between us, and while I try not to linger on it for fear it’ll perpetuate Colson’s envious resentment—which Dustin and Carla definitely created—I do genuinely love spending time with the kid.

I see him as more of a friend than a son, and sometimes it rattles me a bit. I’m supposed to be a guardian, not a pal. Even if the connection we have is friendly, I should try to keep at least some distance. Just to make sure the boundaries are clear.

Plus, I’m twice his age, although with Cyrus, that doesn’t matter. He’s wise beyond his years, and can hold up conversation with grown ass men better than most grown ass men I know.

He’s a real special kid. If I could grant one wish for him, it’d be to get him socializing more.

There’s nothing wrong with being an introvert, and while I can’t relate to crippling social anxiety myself, I feel for him. When he gets overwhelmed by his anxiousness, it hurts my heart, like someone is stabbing me with a dull knife. If anything, that’s the main reason I want to be a friend to him. I want him to feel comfort and companionship, but I also want to help break him out a little more; show him that he can find solace in other people as well.

As far as I know, he’s never even had a girlfriend. *Or a boyfriend.*

That thought sticks in my mind as I strip out of the top half of my wetsuit, drying my hair off with my towel while I hop up the steps to the house. Once inside, I make a beeline to the kitchen for a drink. It’s quiet in here, and when I check my watch, I find that it’s already after seven.

At the fridge, I pull out a bottle of water and drink in silence, wondering what the boys will want for dinner, and if Colson will be gracing us with his presence tonight. It would be a nice change of pace for him to show up. But then again, I’m used to it being just me and Cy.

Another point I would never admit out loud is… I kind of like it that way.

I like spending time alone with him. *Is that weird?*

Don’t answer that.

Not only do I relish the idea that he feels comfortable around me, but I definitely feel comfortable around him. There’s just something about him that’s familiar. It’s as if he reminds me of someone I used to know…

Someone I used to…

I pause, my forehead lining as I stare at the kitchen island.

Someone I used to know, with jet black hair, and pale skin. His eyes weren’t green, but still… I remember them shining. I remember them sparkling up at me from where he was kneeling at my feet.

My stomach flips upside down fast, an odd chill washing over me.

Holy fucking shit, how have I never noticed it before??

Cyrus reminds me of my friend from college. The one who shall remain nameless… The one who exists purely as a form of mental torture, creeping around my brain, taunting me with persistent questions and subjective fantasies.

My thoughts are spiraling when I hear light footsteps. I'm still just standing in front of the open fridge, water bottle in hand, as the kid I've been thinking about saunters over to the marble island behind me.

Great. Just great. Perfect fucking timing.

Okay, Vance. Just act normal. Everything is fine. Whatever connections you were just making in your head don't matter. It's irrelevant. Cyrus is your stepson. That's all.

My body is stiff, but I attempt to calm myself down as I turn and force a politely casual smile, taking another sip of my drink.

"Hey…" Cyrus mumbles, quietly. It's the way he talks, soft and sometimes hesitant. As if he *doesn't* possess all the knowledge of someone who should be much more forthcoming.

He *had a low, sort of raspy voice, too…*

"Hey, kid," I grumble, fighting with myself to act normal, grin still firmly planted on my face.

That is, until I realize Cyrus's cheeks are pinker than usual. His eyes dart briefly down, then spring back up, like he's forcing himself not to look at me. I'm puzzled for only a moment before I remember that I'm naked from the waist up, with only my wet suit on, unzipped and hanging off my hips.

A thick swallow bobs my throat as I glance down at myself. I'm also still a little wet since I barely dried myself on the way inside. Just enough not to be dripping on the floor.

My eyes glide back up to find him staring at me in a way that's a bit more… *pronounced* than usual. And now that I'm thinking about what I was just thinking about, it's impossible not to notice it.

Cyrus is a shy kid, this we know, which means he has a tendency to get flushed and fluttery. But I'd always just assumed it was because of his anxiety. It's never occurred to me, until right now, that maybe it's because of *me*.

Maybe that's why he blushes so much… Maybe that's why he can barely hold eye contact for more than a couple of seconds, and why he fidgets so much.

Maybe that's why sometimes the air surrounding us grows heavy with an unexplained pull.

I gulp again. *That's insane. He's not looking at me that way…*

Right?

My breathing is picking up quickly as it dawns on me that we're just *standing* here, staring at each other in silence. I decide to take a shot at making words, fast, in order to cut through the bizarre tension that's swallowing us up out of nowhere.

Unfortunately, the first one that comes out is a throaty, "Beautiful…" I clear it and try again. "Waves. I mean, the *waves* were… beautiful."

God, what the hell is wrong with me?? That's not how human beings speak.

The light of sunset streaming in through the windows casts a glint over his pale skin and dark hair. He nods, then blinks. The kid is all wide, sparkly green eyes, pink cheeks and even pinker lips. Tall, and lean, strong.

And now *I* can't stop staring.

He parts his lips, and I think I notice them quiver ever-so-slightly before he murmurs, "That sounds… nice."

"It was," I breathe, locked in and unable to move. I can't seem to break free from whatever's holding me right now.

Cyrus might be gay… He's never said anything to me, but then why would he discuss relationships with his stepfather? Because that's what I am…

His mother's *husband*.

There's something happening in my stomach that I can't place. It's an intense flutter, and what's worse, now that these nonsensical thoughts are unleashed inside my skull, I'm thinking this might not be the first time I've felt it.

Maybe I've stuffed it down and disregarded it before, but it feels so familiar.

This feels just like something that swept me up before, into a cloud of forbidden lust.

My thoughts are rife with rampant curiosity, pointing directly at the boy —the *man*—standing before me. We've only ever spoken about typical stuff; books, movies, hobbies. Not much deeper than our philosophies on such things. So maybe it's my fault that I don't know what his situation is. What his preferences are. Maybe I should have asked…

Though right now, I'm not sure how *knowing* would help me.

Stop being weird. You definitely don't need to know if your stepson likes guys.

The cold from the still-open fridge is cooling off my back while the rest of me feels balmy. Cyrus is sort of propped up against the marble island, his hand gripping the side of it while he fidgets in place.

"You want something to drink?" I ask, going for normal, although right now I feel like every word out of my mouth is incredibly suspect.

This is totally normal. We're being normal. Nothing peculiar is happening… Just standing around having a conversation.

Without me even noticing, my pulse is pumping like crazy in my neck.

Cyrus's eyes fall down to my chest once more before his smooth, rumbly voice utters, "Sure."

This hypnotic state I'm in has clouded my brain. So much so that rather than reaching behind me into the fridge to get him a drink, I simply extend the arm whose hand is holding my bottle of water.

It's half-empty, and I was just drinking from it. Why on earth I would *ever* offer it to him is beyond all rationale. But I've done it, and there's no turning back now.

His eyes drop to the bottle in my hand, and without question, without even a modicum of hesitation, he takes it from me. Our fingers brush as he does, zapping my hand with chills that sheet my flesh in goosebumps.

Cyrus lifts the bottle to his mouth, his plush lips wrapping around the top as he takes a drink. My eyes zone in on his Adam's apple dipping in his throat as he swallows, and suddenly, I've completely forgotten who or where I am.

And the things I've been forcing down for so many years rush right up to the surface like a flooding high tide.

Long fingers on shapely hands, angled jaw and rose petal lips… Tall frame made up of sharp planes and taut curves of muscle…

He finishes his drink, and I *feel* it… The quenching of a thirst.

That mouth… Holy God, where did that mouth come from?

A memory floats behind my eyes, but this time it isn't my nameless friend… It's my stepson. *Cyrus* is gazing up at me with his lips parted, tongue waiting. Hands tied behind his back…

In my mind, the urge is so strong I can't resist it for one more second. I close the roughly three feet of space separating us and push into him. I curl my fingers around that sloped, pretty throat, and lean over his mouth to capture what's *mine*…

A loud smack ripples in the air, breaking the spell and snapping me out of a heavy hold. I jump back, and Cyrus does too, both of our faces flinging in the direction where Colson just stomped into the room and whipped his backpack against the wall.

My pulse is popping rapidly while I gawk at Colson, struggling to reacquaint myself with reality. *I'm their stepfather. I'm a responsible adult.*

I'm old enough to know better.

Be a parent.

"Hey, Col," my voice grates from deep within my throat, where I'm attempting to swallow down whatever was just cooked up in this room. "How was school?"

Colson says nothing. He narrows his gaze at me, then slides it over to his brother, radiating a furious suspicion, which is fucking crazy.

Nothing was happening.

We weren't doing anything.

Why do I feel like I need to justify that fact??

For as much as I'm fumbling inside right now, I can feel Cyrus quavering even worse beside me. And then I remember once more that the fridge is open, and I'm still partially wet. My nipples are as hard as little stones.

Closing the fridge slowly, I step back to put more distance between Cyrus and me. He seems to be frozen, staring at his brother like they're having some sort of telepathic conversation. And Colson doesn't look pleased.

It's fine. He doesn't know. They don't know what was happening in your brain. No one does. Just lock it all back up and throw away the goddamn key.

I clear my throat. "Well, I'm gonna order Thai for dinner… if anyone's interested."

And then I stumble to the doorway, feeling Colson's watchful gaze on me as I brush past him. I dart up the stairs to my bedroom, and all the while my head is spinning.

What is wrong with me??

Get it together, Vance. You're slipping.

Inside the bedroom, I close the door and lean up against it. My eyelids flutter and my head drops back, banging gently on the wood. And brushing my hand slowly between my thighs, I find myself as hard as granite.

Well, that's… new.

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COLSON



On tonight's episode of Colson Can't Sleep…

Hopping down the steps from our house onto the beach, I pull a rolled joint from my pocket. It's after one in the morning, and I know if I don't get some rest now, I'll be a fucking zombie at school tomorrow. Normally, I'd just go in late, but I have Bio first period, and Mr. Greene is a real asshole.

More than anything, I just don't want to hear it, from anyone. Teachers, Granger, Mom… Step-Dick. I figure if I make a solid effort to just get to school on time, maybe I can coast through the next two weeks undetected.

Still, at the rate I'm going now, I'll be lucky to pull three hours of sleep. Meaning I'll be cranky as fuck. Everyone better watch their asses.

Let's see if this new indica blend I got helps at all.

Trudging through the sand, I walk down toward the water, then plop onto my ass, lighting up right away. I take in a long pull of smoke and hold on to it, gazing out over the calm waves before releasing a puff, expelling it out in front of me.

A flash from earlier pops into my head and my left fist tightens as I dig it into the sand so hard it stings.

I fucking *saw that*, in the kitchen. I witnessed something happening between my brother and that know-it-all, do-gooder, *Tauren Vance*.

My brother… *Mine*. Not Tauren's.

I actually came home at a reasonable time for once, figuring I'd chill by the pool, maybe talk to Cyrus. He was jumpy and distant after what

happened between us the other night, and then I saw him talking to Carey fucking Culliver in rec class, which pissed me off more than I care to admit.

Cyrus running from me after we fool around, I can deal with. It actually helps me out a little, since I'm not one to linger on what we do together anyway, because what purpose would that serve? It can't *mean* anything.

But Cyrus talking to the town gossip known as Carey Culliver? *No.* I don't like it.

If my brother wants to come out, more power to him. I'm sure it could be only good for him, which I have to support. But I refuse to let him date anyone…

From school. Date anyone *from school*.

All those guys only want one thing; to make him *theirs*. They like adding to their little Solana Beach Prep gay entourage, and honestly, I think they care more about the label than the person beneath it.

Anyway, that's why I cut out on my friends after school. I wanted to come home and talk to my brother. To make sure he knows he doesn't need to settle for people who don't really know him. I need to protect him from people who are just looking to use him; from people who will break his heart.

And speaking of…

When I came home, I walked in on whatever the hell was happening between him and a half-naked Tauren in the kitchen.

They weren't technically doing anything—at least, not visibly. They were just standing there, staring at each other, and to me, that's enough evidence on its own. Usually, the two of them won't shut up, blabbing away about all sorts of nerd shit until my ears are bleeding. And of course, it's normally framed by Cyrus's barely subtle drooling over Tauren.

But it's always seemed like Tauren doesn't notice how my brother lusts after him like he's a double-fudge ice cream sundae with caramel and whipped cream. He's never appeared to pay any mind to Cy's wandering eyes.

Until today.

Today, it looked like he was not only acknowledging it… but *reciprocating*.

Tauren was studying Cyrus, like he was seeing something new. A shiny toy he wasn't searching for, but just happened to stumble upon, and now that he has, he's thinking about playing with it.

Which is fucking ludicrous since he's straight and married to our goddamn mother.

He was *watching gay porn the other night, though…*

My teeth grind into fucking dust, and I pull an aggressively long drag of smoke from my joint. My mind won't stop flitting back to the way they were looking at each other. Standing not quite close enough to raise suspicions, but still close enough that it was like they were testing some new waters.

As if every day they'll stand an inch closer until eventually they're where they want to be… *Wearing each other like a goddamn garment, apparently.*

"Ugh!" I growl and flop onto my back in the sand. "This is fucking bullshit…"

If Tauren wants to have some sort of bi-awakening, why can't he just do it with a random dude? Why does he have to focus his creeper-vision on my brother…

His barely legal stepson.

I drape my arm over my face. But *I'm* his stepson, too. What's wrong with *me*?

Rolling my eyes at myself, I shake my head. *Okay, that's not the point. I'm straight, and Tauren's little perverted crush is on Cyrus. As usual.*

All hail the good twin.

Pulling my arm off my face, I sit up, squinting out over the water. Taking in another pull of smoke, I keep going until my mind has calmed itself just enough. When my joint is down to my fingers, I stub it out in the sand and stand up slowly.

I'm light-headed for a solid minute, which feels like a long time, but whatever. My body aches, though I'm assuming it's because I'm tired, which means I should be able to pass out when I get inside. Sure, my thoughts are still chugging along, but now it feels like my brain is dripping with molasses. It's much more sluggish, which is a good thing. This is why I smoke. To chase away the worry, and my persistent nausea, just for now, since the meds Dr. Roberts prescribes don't help with dick. They make me feel like another person…

And I know that's what they want. The doctors, the teachers, Mom. They want me to be someone else. Someone better.

They want me to be Cyrus.

Well, joke's on them, because I'll never be my brother.

As soon as I step inside the house and slide the glass door behind me, a voice grumbles from the dimly lit hallway. "Self-medicating again?"

I recognize the voice right away, but I still make it a point to slowly roll my neck in his direction, giving him a hazy glare. "What are you gonna do… tell on me? It's *legal*."

He gives me a smug look. "You're seventeen, so… Not just yet." Then he winks.

"Whatever." I roll my eyes. "It helps me get to sleep, Officer. Relax."

"Hey, I'm not here to scrutinize." He holds his hands up, then leans against the wall, folding his arms over his chest. It's not until he does so that I realize he's shirtless. I'm not affected by him… *My mouth is dry from the weed, is all.* "I'm just saying, if you needed help with anything…"

My gaze narrows. "You know I'm *Colson*, right?"

Tauren lets out a small chuckle. "Yea. I know. You're a pain in the ass, but that doesn't mean I don't care what happens to you." My chest tightens in a way that makes me feel itchy from the inside. Until he says, "Plus, I need to make sure you get to school on time for the next two weeks. If I have to hear it from your mother again, I'm gonna start losing my hair, and we can't have that, right?"

My jaw clenches. "Don't worry. I'll go to fucking school." I storm past him, but his voice catches me.

"On time?"

"Yes," I growl. "On time."

"Thanks, bud," Tauren murmurs as I stomp away. "Goodnight!"

My teeth are practically dust by the time I make it upstairs. Tauren has this way of really just getting under my skin. Sure, I hate his fucking guts because of the way Cyrus looks at him, but also, it's his nonstop badgering that makes me want to strangle him.

Because it's just so goddamn typical…

Tauren doesn't actually give a fuck about me. He's just another guy trying to act like the hero, but behind closed doors, he's a slave to his secret urges. Just like the rest of us.

And now he's turned his sights on my brother.

I'm used to Cyrus getting a goddamn parade everywhere he goes. That's normal. He's always gotten the attention from everyone… The love of Mom *and* Dad.

The memory flashes…

What are you doing to your brother?!

Pain ripples like it just happened, the tickle of blood running down my face. The snap in my collarbone. I run my fingers over it while shooting a glance at Cy's bedroom door.

And now he gets heart eyes from Tauren, too? It's kinda bullshit.

It was one thing when it was just dorky conversation. Their stupid inside jokes and laughing around the dinner table when they thought I wasn't home. But today was different. The mirrored interest… Cyrus's longing being *reciprocated* by our mother's husband. *What the fuck is up with that??*

My mind is whirling through it all… Carey touching Cyrus at school today… Tauren's shallow breathing in the kitchen… How *close* he was standing to my brother.

My brother.

Something mischievous slithers, from my chest up into my brain.

The *good* twin…

Opening my bedroom door, I step inside and close it behind me, pressing my back to the wood. "How do they know which one of us is the *good* one, anyway…?"

If they only knew what Cyrus does behind closed doors…

No one knows what he's truly like on the inside. No one but me.

Same goes for Tauren. Out there acting like he's a *good guy*, when in reality, he's just as dark and devious as we are.

Maybe I should teach them all a lesson.…

My gaze lands on the opposite wall, the one that separates my bedroom from my twin's as I consider what I'm thinking of doing. A plan taking shape…

Stepping farther into my room, I move up to the full-length mirror by my dresser. I stand before it and look at myself.

Really, it's the only way… The only way to show them.

I brush my hair away from my eyes and bite my lip.

Tauren wants Cyrus?

I'll fucking give him Cyrus.



My few foggy hours of sleep did nothing to thwart my rage, nor did it clear my head of the desire to do some damage.

Waking up this morning, I'm still one hundred percent on board, and the more I think about it, the better it sounds in my brain.

I'm going to seduce Tauren while pretending to be Cyrus.

Oldest twin trick in the book. Actually, the simplicity is what has me so excited.

I know my brother. I know him better than anyone. Acting like him will be the easiest thing in the world. All I have to do is practice my nerd-speak, trade my scowl for a timid deer-in-the-headlights look and I'll be golden.

I'm actually a lot quieter than people assume I am from the outside. I'm only *loud* when I'm fucked up, or with my friends. Which, yes, is often, but still. I like being quiet, too. I like to think.

It's what happens when my thoughts overpower me that I don't like.

As far as our looks go, Cy and I are identical as fuck. It's as easy as removing the nail polish, brushing my hair out of my eyes and wearing a long-sleeved shirt to hide my tattoos. *Presto manifesto, you've got yourself a good twin.*

My plan for initial contact is all mapped out. I'll do everything in my power not to get detention today so I can be home before Cy, who has geek practice or some shit until six. When I get home, I'll change into his clothes, sneak up on stepdaddy alone, and test this theory out.

See? Fool-proof.

I'm jittering with anticipation all day at school. Through each and every class, I can't stop imagining the look on Tauren's face thinking I'm Cyrus. I even spend all of Spanish class, with my brother sitting right next to me, secretly making notes of things I can talk about with Tauren, to ensure I sound like Cy the smarty-pants.

For the first time in years, I can't wait to go home.

When the longest day ever finally ends, I hightail it to the parking lot to avoid being seen by Cyrus before he heads off for whatever the hell

gathering he and his dingus friends are attending. But just as I'm reaching our Audi, someone grabs me by the arm.

I spin, forcing myself not to scowl at whoever is stopping me. *Practice.*

"Hey, babe," Annabelle beams, then throws herself at me, draping her arms around my neck and melting her body to mine. She whispers in my ear, "My parents aren't home until nine. Wanna come over?"

Her tongue extends to swipe my earlobe. It's something I know is *supposed* to feel good, but right now, it's just twisting my stomach into knots. Which makes me angry.

I pry myself out of her grip. "Can't. I have plans."

She looks crushed for all of three seconds, before popping her hip out and glaring at me. "Oh yea? What's her name, Colson?"

"Huh?" I shake my head, fishing into my pocket for my key.

"You're obviously cheating on me." She glares, whiny tone striking a nerve. *God, give me the good twin patience.* "You've barely been touching me lately, and when you do, you're not into it. So… what's her *name*, Colson?"

I roll my eyes, whipping open my car door. "I don't have time for this shit, Annabelle. I'm late."

"Late to see your whore!" she shrieks, diving for me as I leap into my car.

I just barely get the door shut with her on the other side, pressing the button to start my car as quickly as I can.

"Colson!" she shouts, pulling on my door handle over and over.

Shifting the car into drive, I speed off, as carefully as possible not to run her over while still getting the fuck out of there. The girl actually *chases* my car for a few steps, screaming at me like I just stole the damn thing from her or something.

"Jesus Christ…" I mutter to myself, shaking it off as best I can.

I guess I drive the ladies a little nuts. I chuckle at the thought while I cruise up the street. But the amusement falls away fast when I think about what she was saying.

I haven't been into her lately. At first, I thought maybe I was just bored, but then I tried making out with Charlie's girlfriend, Isla, the other night after Charlie passed out. And that didn't exactly feel *right* either. Nothing with girls has felt quite right since… The honeymoon.

Whatever. I can't dwell on it right now, on the eve of my genius plan's execution. *I need to focus.*

Pulling into the driveway, I park in the garage so that hopefully Tauren won't see the car and assume I'm home. Then I grab one of Cy's favorite outfits—gray flannel, black jeans, and Vans—which I swiped this morning after getting rid of all traces of black nail polish on my fingers, and change in the car.

Once I'm done, I look in the rearview mirror, brushing my hair away from my eyes. Blinking at my reflection, I tug my lower lip between my teeth the way Cyrus always does…

That look that he gets when he's nervous, but excited… waiting for me to give him what he needs. It causes a hard jerk between my legs, and I reach down to adjust my dick.

Oh, this is good. This is definitely gonna work.

I'm mentally preparing myself as I leave the car and walk up to the front door. Taking a deep breath, I open it and push inside. *It's showtime.*

Looking around, I listen for any sign of Tauren. He tends to be home much more than my mother is, being that she spends all of her time out spending his money while he stays here, making it. I meander through the kitchen, then the living room, the study, and the gym before finally, I spot him.

He's out back, by the pool. Peering through the glass doors, I watch him for a moment. He's in his swim trunks, fitted enough to show off his muscular legs and a high, firm ass. Then of course the rest of him…

Not that I care to admit it, but I see why Cyrus is always swooning over him. He's built like a Greek god. Wide chest, broad shoulders; long, muscled arms with veins everywhere. And those abs… I mean, *Jesus*. He has these crazy defined cum-gutters that you just can't help but stare at.

I have muscles, don't get me wrong, but this guy has *bulk*. Not in a huge, steroid way, though. It looks good on him…

He looks… good.

I realize my mouth is damn near overflowing with saliva, and I swallow hard. *Okay, well, this could work. I'm supposed to be acting like Cyrus, and I'm already doing what Cyrus does every day, so… Perfect, I guess.*

Exiting through the backdoor, I take quiet, tentative steps like my brother does, wandering over to where Tauren is sitting at the edge of the pool with his feet dangling into the water. He looks up.

The moment of truth…

He smiles, the big, bright one, reserved for my brother. “Hey, kid. How was school?”

I let out a soft breath of relief. “Good. I um… got into some more reading on the UCLA curriculum, so that was cool.” Something Cyrus would totally say.

And Tauren eats it right up. “That’s great. Make any progress on *Dune*?”

Oh, God. My nerves are instantly ramped up. I know next to nothing about fucking *Dune*, and those two are obsessed with it. I read up as much as possible online, but I’m not sure how well I’ll do if he asks me specifics…

“I knocked out a few chapters in the morning,” I rumble, breaking our eye contact.

For some fucking reason I feel like he’s going to *know* I’m lying… Like he’ll be able to somehow sense that I’m not Cyrus. It’s kind of ludicrous, since he hasn’t even known us *that* long. But still… I’m freaking out.

But before I can fall to my knees and confess, Tauren says, “If you lap me, I’m gonna be pissed.”

I glance at him, and he’s grinning. Teasingly.

My confidence rises as I sink onto the ground, sitting cross-legged beside him. “How’s the water?”

His head tilts in my direction, eyes appraising me for a moment. Maybe it’s how close I’m sitting to him… But he gets this uneasy glint to his bright blue eyes.

He’s nervous, too.

Maybe he’s remembering their little eye-fuck session in the kitchen yesterday.

“It’s nice.” His voice comes out grungy. And then his gaze drops to my mouth for a split second before he turns his face back to the pool.

Anger bubbles up inside me. Because even though my plan is working and I should be happy, this fucking asshole is lusting after my brother right now. He *was* checking Cy out yesterday. *I can’t believe this shit…*

I scoot in closer still, until we’re less than a foot apart, and he peers at me from the corner of his eye.

“There’s something I’ve always wanted to ask you…” I start, keeping my tone as soft and easy as possible.

He doesn’t speak, just keeps warily watching me in his peripheral. But his chest is moving a bit too quickly for someone as nonchalant as he’s trying to act.

Lifting my finger, I run it over a tattoo on his side, ever so gently. But still, he flinches, face flinging as he gawks at my hand like it’s a scorpion about to sting him.

“What does this tattoo mean?” I ask, brushing the ink once more. I witness him shiver and I have to bite back my victorious smile. “I’m sorry if that’s too forward…”

His eyes lift to mine, and he clears his throat. “No, it’s… not.” Both of our gazes now fall to the ink on his left side, and my curiously hesitant finger swiping it like a paintbrush. The tattoo is of a lion with words written around him in a strange script.

“It says, ‘Out of the eater, something to eat. Out of the strong, something sweet,’ written in Hebrew,” he tells me. “It was a riddle that Samson told his wedding guests in the Bible.”

Tauren pauses, and his lips curl like he’s recalling something. “It’s notoriously confusing… My mother read it to me before she died, and I remember her laughing about how it’s barely even a riddle. At least not a good one. But when I thought about it later in life, I began to get it.” He leans back, holding himself up on his arms. “To me, it means what we need is given, even when it’s maybe… not what we expected.”

Something soothing seeps into my chest. I have no clue how or why… But this feeling that I *understand* what he’s saying comes over me. And it brings a small curve to my mouth, completely against my will.

I tug my lower lip with my teeth, again, fully unintentionally, although it’s the standard Cyrus move. And Tauren’s lips part. His eyes darken… Then they fall to my mouth.

There’s no fucking air around us anymore. It feels like I’m up high in the atmosphere. And it takes me a moment to realize my fingers are still grazing his soft, warm skin…

Fuck…

“I…” My voice breaks the silence, but not quite, since it comes out a rumbly whisper. “I like that.”

“Do you?” Tauren growls.

My cock pulses and my balls ache as blood rushes below my waist. I can’t stop watching his mouth…

It looks… sweet.

“Hey, boys!”

The voice rings and I jump. Out of my *fucking* skin.

Tauren and I both jerk away from each other, gawking up as my mom clacks onto the veranda in her expensive heels. “How’s it going?” she asks, though she’s not really paying attention to us at all, buried in her phone. I’m surprised she isn’t walking into things.

I croak, “Fine,” while Tauren says, “Good.” And we peek at each other.

“Honey, you’re handling dinner, right?” Mom asks Tauren, going for a bottle of white wine in the outdoor fridge. Before he can answer, she keeps going. “Oh, and Cyrus, please tell your brother I want him home at a reasonable hour this weekend while I’m in Malibu.”

She’s texting vigorously as confusion muddles my thoughts. *Malibu??* I didn’t know she was going anywhere this weekend. I guess she forgot to tell me…

Why am I not surprised?

“Mom, why don’t you just text him?” I gripe, saying something I know Cyrus would say. “You know he doesn’t listen to me.”

“Thanks, sweetie. You’re the best,” she chirps, completely disregarding what I said as she clomps back inside the house with her wine bottle.

Tauren and I are quiet for a moment before he nudges me and says, “Next time, let’s dress up in hilarious outfits and see if she even notices.”

I can’t help but snort. “She definitely wouldn’t.”

“I could wear a bear suit.” He chuckles.

My grin widens. “And I’ll be Big Bird.”

“I could wear chaps,” he keeps going.

“Or you could wear nothing,” I rasp, eyeing him with just enough humor. But his laughter stops.

He gets serious; eyes wide, mouth agape. He’s actually blushing, which is crazy since I’m supposed to be the one doing that. But then I feel heat in my face and realize that I *am* blushing also… Because honestly, those words just came out. I totally didn’t even mean to suggest he get… naked. The flirting game we were playing seems to have taken over.

I gulp, and Tauren does the same, visibly. I’m keyed up and tense once more, meaning I need to get out of here before I blow it. *Literally.*

Standing up fast, I mumble, “Let me know when dinner’s ready,” stalking off toward the house.

Mission accomplished. We flirted and I think it’s safe to say he was totally into it. Day one was a success.

And now I need to go jerk off before my goddamn balls burst.

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TAUREN



Staring.

I've been sitting here, just *staring* at the wall, for probably way too long.

I'm not sure what I'm even doing. I'm supposed to be working… But it won't take.

I'm preoccupied. *Scattered*.

But I'm the CFO, for fuck's sake. If I want to take a mental health day, I should be able to.

Usually work is my distraction, but right now I'm too distracted for my distraction. *What the hell does that even mean??*

Maybe I *should* just call out. Hole up here in my office and not come out all day. I think that would be an effective strategy for dealing with my problems.

No. I don't have problems. Everything is *fine*.

It's just… There have been some weird things coming up lately, burrowing their way through, from all the way down, deep in my center. Not sure why it's happening *now* of all times. But I guess, when else would it happen?

I was hoping for never.

Rubbing my eyes hard with my fingers, I crouch over in my chair. My dumbass friends are getting to me. That's all this is.

I'm happy in my marriage. I'm content with this new life that *I* designed for myself.

I'm not *gay*…

And I’m definitely *not* looking inappropriately at my stepson.

Point blank. End of discussion.

Okay… fine. So I like fantasizing about the idea of kissing and touching another guy sometimes, but that doesn’t have to mean anything. It doesn’t need to be decoded like some riddle of my inner desires. It’s all just based on one interaction I’ve built up in my mind over the years, anyway.

It’s probably nowhere near as exhilarating as I’m making it out to be.

You’ll never know if you don’t try it again.…

Then I guess I’ll never know.

Sitting up straight, I pull myself together with a huff. I’m *married*. I love my wife as much as I need to, and her kids are just that; *her* kids. *My* stepsons. No more, no less.

Everything. Is. Fine.

Eventually I’m able to get some work done, though not much. I can hear Carla yelling off in the distance of the house somewhere, I’m guessing as she packs for her little trip. *She probably lost a tube of lipstick or something.* She’s so goddamn dramatic. As if she doesn’t have fifty billion lipsticks as it is, but when she can’t find one—which, frankly, is the exact same shade as at least a quarter of the rest of them—she freaks out.

My teeth are grinding together while I glare at my computer screen. I swear to God, it’s like she’s trying to annoy the fuck out of me on purpose today. It’s as if she can sense that something is up with me, and she’s doing her damndest to pick at it and pick at it, like a scab that just wants to heal.

Whether she’s doing so intentionally or not is irrelevant.

Closing my eyes, I take a breath. I’ve never been this irritable before.

I have no idea where it’s coming from…

“Tauren!” My name is barked from somewhere outside the door to my office and I drop my forehead onto my desk.

Serenity now.

“Tauren, Jesus.” Carla comes barging into the room like a raving lunatic. “I’ve been calling you for ten minutes!”

“I’m working, dear,” I mumble into the desk.

She’s quiet for a moment before she replies. “It’s four-thirty. You don’t usually work this late…”

“Not *usually*, but sometimes I do,” I hiss through a clenched jaw, then lift my head, aiming the most patronizing glare I possess at my wife. “What can I do for you, my queen?”

She rolls her eyes. “Have you spoken with Colson at all?? I haven’t seen him in days, and I need him to understand about the curfew. If I get one more phone call from Dean Granger, I’m going to kill myself.”

I blink heavily. “Honey… If you text him, I’m sure that’s more than enough. He’s practically eighteen.”

“Yea, and if we’re not careful, he’ll be living with us forever,” she snaps. “I need him to graduate. I need him to get his ass out of this house, go to college and figure his shit out. I’m over it.”

My glare turns bewildered. “He’s your son… Aren’t you supposed to love and support him no matter what?”

“Uh, no,” she scoffs. “You’re supposed to push them out of the nest, Tauren.” She stops and flips her hair. “Look, I wouldn’t expect you to understand this since you’re not a parent, but you can’t let your kids walk all over you…”

“Well, yea. I get that—”

“You need to whip them into shape.” She keeps talking, pacing around my office touching things. “Force them to get it together, or they’ll end up living in your basement when they’re thirty.”

It’s my goddamn basement, anyway.

Conceding to this nonsensical argument, I nod along. “Okay, babe. I get it. I’ll be here all weekend. I’ll make sure Colson behaves.” Standing up, I round my desk and wander over to her. “When are you leaving?”

“Early in the morning,” she sighs up at me. “Eight-thirty.”

“Two hours after my day starts.” I grin, and she rolls her eyes once more. She comes down on Colson for doing it, but I see where he gets it from.

Reaching out, I brush her hair behind her ear with my fingers. “I’ll miss you.”

She releases a bright, *Barbie doll* smile and wraps her arms around my waist, hugging me tight. And I stare over her head at the wall while I hold her back.

It’s fine. It’s all fine.



I FINALLY EMERGE from my office at about seven.

Typically, we have some variation of prepared meals in the house, made and delivered by the catering company of this chef Carla loves. Personally, I enjoy cooking, but I don't always have it in me to make dinner after work. Like tonight, for example.

In the kitchen, I stuff a lasagna tray into the oven to heat up. Looking around, I'm relieved at the prospect of eating by myself, since I'm feeling off today as it is. I can hear Carla in the living room, laughing on the phone, most likely with one of her friends she spends eighty percent of her day chatting with. She probably won't want to eat the lasagna anyway, opting for a juice or a minuscule salad instead.

I contemplate calling for the boys to join me, but that idea makes me even more jittery.

There's no discernible reason for me to be feeling like this.

Nothing *happened* the other day in the kitchen, or outside by the pool. If something had actually occurred, I'd have a reason to feel all jacked up, but it didn't. It was just a feeling.

Maybe that's worse.

While the food heats, I go to the living room. Carla looks up at me and raises her brows.

"Are the boys eating?" I ask her quietly, so as not to interrupt her phone call.

She simply shrugs at me.

Sighing internally, I pull my phone out of my pocket and text Cyrus that dinner is almost ready. He responds instantly that he'll be right down.

Hmm… So he's here.

Stuffing down my unnecessary tension, I text Colson next.

Me: Are you coming home anytime soon?

I stare at the screen for a couple of minutes while the message is marked as *read*. Then the little typing dots pop up, indicating that he's responding.

Colson: What's it to you?

I scoff to myself while typing out a reply.

Me: Your mom's leaving tomorrow for the weekend… it'd be nice if we could have dinner together as a family for once

Colson: She's going to Malibu. She's not dying.

Me: Colson…

Colson: Fine I'll be there in ten

Tucking my phone away, I grab plates and set the table. A few minutes later, I take the lasagna out and serve it up, just as Cyrus spins into the kitchen.

Anxiety is already thrumming through my limbs, and it just doesn't make any *fucking sense*.

What is this??

"Need help with anything?" he asks, polite and casual. *Normal.*

No hints of any awkwardness whatsoever, which means I'm completely making up whatever these flustering feelings are. It's not a comfort.

The kid is totally fine, and it's me. *I'm* acting like a nutbag.

"Uh… no," I mumble. "Just go have a seat. I'll bring you a plate."

"Thanks." He saunters by me and goes for the dining room.

And I'm up in my head as I make three plates.

Taking a much-needed calming breath, I bring two of them into the dining room and place one in front of Cyrus. My eyes linger on him for a moment, but he's not paying me any mind. Except when he mumbles *thank you* again, completely innocuously.

Sitting down with my plate, I watch Cyrus subtly as he digs into his food, not so much as a glance given my way. I should be glad that he's acting normal, but for some reason, it's confusing the shit out of me.

It's making me think the weirdness between us over the last couple of days never happened, or that it was something only *I* felt, which isn't good. I mean, *shit*… I can still feel his fingers dancing over the flesh of my side yesterday when he touched my tattoo.

The memory has me shifting in my seat.

Before I can obsess over it any more, Colson comes stomping into the room with his plate of lasagna in hand, plopping into the seat next to Cyrus. Cy glances up at him, his lashes fluttering briefly before he zones back in on his meal.

Colson stares at him for a moment, then faces me. "Where's Mom? I thought this was supposed to be a *family* dinner?"

Our eyes lock onto one another in the typical show for power, seeing who will break first. It happens often between us because Colson's used to running the show, and I suppose I'm officially here to knock him down a peg.

I keep my gaze on his while I call out, "Carla… Dinner."

But I can still hear her laughing on the phone, talking and talking and fucking *talking*, so chances are the *family dinner* will just be me and her sons.

"Just eat," I grumble at Colson before digging into my food.

The meal goes on in complete silence for what feels like an eternity. Usually, I would make conversation with Cyrus about school or what he's been reading lately, but it seems as if we've been thrown off-kilter. Hopelessness creeps up on me quick.

Does he feel weirded out by those moments we had?

Maybe I wasn't over-thinking it. Maybe I didn't make it up…

It happened, and it made Cyrus feel uncomfortable. *That's the worst thought ever.*

As I'm pushing food around on my plate, my sparse appetite having fully vanished, I peek up to find Colson staring at me. When our eyes meet, he looks away fast. My subtle gaze moves to Cyrus next, and he's focusing on his meal. But then he glances up, our eyes locking for a split second before mine dart away.

What a great family dinner…

That was sarcasm, by the way.

Once we're done eating, we all get up, silently, collecting plates and bringing them to the kitchen. While dumping my plate into the sink, I feel Cyrus moving up next to me, and all my muscles tense, the hairs on the back of my neck standing straight.

"Hey, so I finished *Dune*," he says, and my eyes slink in his direction. He slips his plate into the sink, wearing a pleasant, and completely casual smile on his lips.

Oh, God… Am I looking at his lips? Am I staring *at them??*

Clearing my throat, I decide to busy my hands by rinsing off the dishes. "Oh yea? That was fast."

His smile fades, and he does a little shrug. "Yea, well… I've had more time for reading lately, since the schoolwork has fizzled out."

"I wish I had more time to read," I murmur.

His smile returns, and I don't think I've ever noticed how nice it is. The way his lips slope together, and the slight dimples that carve into his cheeks. It's a very pretty smile.

My head is suddenly fuzzy. I'm all hot and flushed beneath my clothes, and it's mortifying. I don't know what's happening to me, but I need to

leave.

I need to go hide, because this is awful.

Clearing my throat, I say nothing and just saunter away, fingers twitching at my sides while I forbid myself from looking back. I don't know if Cyrus is feeling the tension I am or not, but I can't risk it. I refuse to be that inappropriate man.

I will *not* turn into my father.

Choosing to go back into my office because I don't want to deal with Carla, I hurry back inside the room and close the door behind me. Taking a deep breath, I force myself to focus and get my shit together. I think I need to lose myself in work or something that will take my mind off this sudden shift. After all, I'm a strong, intelligent man. I've always been more logical than emotional, and I *will not* allow these bizarre feelings to drive me.

I just need to fight harder.

This time it actually takes. I end up answering emails, getting a few things done for a proposal we've been working on, and by the time I'm checking my clock again, hours have passed.

Getting up slowly, I peek outside my office only to find silence and dimly lit halls. I can breathe a bit easier as I head upstairs, mind exhausted from all the congested thoughts. I go straight into the shower while Carla flits around the bedroom, still packing. I can't even comprehend how much she needs to bring to a spa for three days, but I don't dare ask. I'm irritable enough as it is.

By the time I'm freshly showered and in my sweatpants, she's passed out in bed with her sleep mask on. Sighing as I watch her, I decide there's no possible way I'll be able to sleep right now. *Maybe reading will help with this pent-up energy coursing through my veins.*

Back in my office, I turn on just my small desk lamp, then meander around the room, thinking. *Worrying*. Apparently, now that I'm done working, I'm back to square one with the thoughts congesting my brain.

I don't want to believe it, but the more I stress, the weirder I act around him, the more it seems as if I've transferred my underlying uncertainties onto my friendship with my stepson. And that *can't* happen.

It's totally normal to reminisce about the past. What's *not* normal is building up fictional angst with a kid who's barely eighteen, and the son of my wife. I really pray I didn't somehow project on him and ruin our

relationship. *Our completely platonic stepfather/stepson relationship, I mean.*

The grinding in my head is too much, and I feel a migraine building. It's all becoming so *loud*, confusing and overwhelming as hell.

A latent confusion in sexuality in my mid-thirties is enough on its own to set a person on edge. Add strange feelings toward a stepson to the mix and you've got all the ingredients for a proper nervous breakdown.

Going to my bar, I pour myself a scotch and sip it slowly. Hopefully, the booze will calm me down a little. I need to relax and stop overthinking before I drive myself insane.

I kill the glass, then pour another, letting the buzz warm me until I'm already feeling slightly better.

So alcohol is the answer, then.

I'll be fine, as long as I stay focused. I've never been one to act impulsively. I'm a planner, a studier… I'm a financial analyst. Choosing to marry Carla and take on this new family is the most snap decision I've ever made, and even that was strictly derived from logic and convenience. Still, I like that I was able to relinquish control enough to make this marriage work. I don't want to regret it.

I know I found Carla for a reason, and that stomping out my inner urges is the right move. I can't let a few new alluring circumstances mess with my head. *I'm right where I belong.*

On my third glass of expensive scotch, I'm hazy and calm. Sauntering over to my desk chair, I slump into it. I lean back, gazing up at the ceiling while I drink and spin slowly in the chair.

My brain sorts through headlines I read so many years ago…

Full circle and facing the door again, it opens a crack before my eyes, and I blink over heavy lids. It's dimly lit in here, but the first thing I see is black hair and pale skin as the tall form slinks into the room, closing the door behind him. I swallow hard.

Am I imagining this?

This can't possibly be real…

I ask him, "What are you doing here?"

Without any prompt, Cyrus walks up to my desk, his steps like the slow prance of a joyous puppy. He looks almost innocently content, which brings warmth of a different kind to my chest.

Until I remind myself that he's barely legal, and my *stepson*, thus sweeping me under an even stronger wave of nervous uncertainty.

"I couldn't sleep," he answers my question quietly, hovering by the edge of the desk while I look up at him from my seat.

"It's not that late," I rumble, unsure of what else to say. He's never come into my office like this before…

At night, when I'm drinking scotch in nothing but sweatpants.

"I came downstairs to get a drink and figured I'd check…" His voice trails and he takes a breath. "To see if you were in here."

I can do nothing more than blink up at him, perplexed. He steps forward, then leans against my desk, only a few feet from where I'm weighted to my chair.

"Why?" I ask, genuinely wondering.

I'm desperately curious to know more about this shift… The sudden draw between us.

Where did it come from? Is it really even that abrupt… Or has it been building for a while now?

No. I won't accept that. I'm not a creepy pervert who's been eyeing his underage stepson for months. This has to be new. *Something* must have changed…

Cyrus tilts his head as his round, green eyes slide from my face to my chest, then back up. "I thought you might want company."

His tone is innocent enough. He sounds the way he always does, filled with an ever-present timidity, and for reasons I can't fathom, it's intriguing as hell.

He's so shy… Why would he come down here and ask me if I want company?

Maybe I didn't make him feel awkward by the pool, or in the kitchen…

Maybe he liked it, too.

While I'm still suspended in having no goddamn clue what's going on or what to do, Cyrus inches forward. His chin drops to the glass in my hand. "Is that scotch?" I nod, robotically. "Can I try some?"

Gaping up at him, my lips part, but I don't know what to say. I mean, I know what I *should* say.

No, you can't. Because you're seventeen. Now, go back upstairs and go to bed. You have school in the morning.

You know… Good, fatherly things.

But my brain doesn’t send the right signals to my mouth, or anywhere else for that matter. Instead, my arm moves on its own and I hold the glass out to him, just like I held out my water bottle the other day.

He accepts it, bringing the glass to his lips. He takes a small sip of the amber liquor, wincing only slightly at the burn while I stare up at him, transfixed.

I’ve spent tons of time talking to this kid over the last few months. We get along very well, but it’s always been friendly. This feels different. It feels more… illustrious.

Like a secret we’re sharing; him in my office with me, alone, sipping scotch.

It’s the same kind of connection we’ve had, only it’s taken a turn. An abrupt left onto an unlit street.

“I kind of like it,” he remarks about the scotch, then takes another sip. “It’s smoky.”

I nod slowly. Because it is. And I really can’t speak.

Cyrus places the glass down on my desk and moves closer until our bare feet bump. Something happens in my gut at the sensation, winding a confusing tightness in my groin.

He leans up on my desk once more, only this time directly in front of where I’m sitting, his head bobbing around the room. “So this is where the magic happens…”

His interesting word choice does nothing to jump-start my voice box, and I continue gawking up at him, watching the shadow of the dull glow from my desk lamp as it traces the lines of his face. He’s wearing a black zip-up hoodie and dark gray sweatpants, like my own, which fit him nicely. The dark clothes compliment his pale complexion in a way that’s noticeable.

I’ve always found this intriguing about the boys… They’ve lived in California their whole lives, yet they’re not tan. I kind of like it. It makes them look different. Unique.

The fog in my head clears just enough when he lifts his foot and runs it leisurely up my shin.

“Cyrus… What are you doing?” I ask, though the words come out far too breathy.

He does a little shrug, the foot continuing its travels up my leg.

“You can’t be doing this,” I tell him with my pulse thumping in my neck. “Go back to your room.”

“Why?” he hums, sitting back farther on my desk. He lifts his foot higher, gliding it over the curve of my bent knee. Up my thigh.

In between my legs.

Quickly, I try to wedge them closed, but it’s too late. His foot is already there, and it’s… rubbing. On my dick.

A zap of heated sensation hits my balls, from the friction of him caressing my cock with his large bare foot. Unable to stop myself watching it for just a moment, I admire how *big* it is. *A man’s foot.* He may not technically be eighteen yet—give it a few weeks—but he’s certainly built like a man. Strong and defined and… *masculine*.

I grab his foot fast in my hand before it can do any more damage. “Cyrus, I mean it. You have to stop. This isn’t right.”

“I just want to help you,” he says, then tugs his lip with his teeth. My cock jumps.

“Help me what?” I grunt on a breath.

His toes wiggle in my hand. “Feel good.”

“You’re being crazy,” I mumble, fighting tooth and nail against every single urge in my body that wants to give in to this… Give in to my needs*; to what I haven’t had in twenty years.* “I’m your stepdad. Where is this coming from?”

“Don’t act like you haven’t thought about it.” He blinks at me, vulnerability shining in the sea of green.

I feel horrible lying, gaslighting him like this, but I don’t have a choice. My wife is asleep upstairs. His *mother*.

I can’t do this.

“I haven’t,” I hiss, doing my best to project confidence I’m not feeling.

Cyrus pauses for a moment, then yanks his foot out of my hand, leaning forward a bit. “I know what you like. I’ve seen it.”

Terror racks my limbs as I stare at him. “What?”

“You like guys too,” he whispers, sliding off the desk until he’s standing again. Hovering over me. “Don’t worry… I won’t tell if you won’t.”

“Cyrus.” I shake my head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, but I need you to stop now. I need you to…”

My words dissolve when he drops to his knees.

What… the… fuck…

He slides his hands up my thighs, massaging them gently as he does. A small, disobedient gasp flees my lips.

“You were saying?” He peers up at me, still wearing that innocent look of his, though now I’m wondering if it’s an act.

Has he been playing me all along? Crushing on me and waiting for the right moment to pounce?

And if so… why does that turn me on so goddamn much?

My head keeps shaking while blood rushes in my ears and rapidly between my thighs. My dick is hardening up fast. He’ll be able to see it.

“Cy… no…” I croak, but his fingers keep creeping up to the waist of my sweatpants.

He tugs them down just enough, then reaches inside. The second his fingers graze the flesh of my thickening cock, I groan. He presses his lips together, eyes stuck below my waist as he takes my dick in his hand, then makes a fist around it.

“*Fuck*… Tauren,” he sighs like he’s in awe, stroking my erection so slowly it’s as if he’s barely moving at all. But it feels divine. The hesitation… The uncertainty. It’s like an aphrodisiac.

“Please,” I breathe, a protest with nothing backing it up.

I’m back in my dorm room in college… Doing something I’d never done before that filled me with more thrill, more devilish appetite than I knew was possible.

I want this… Fuck, I want this so bad. But I can’t… We *can’t.*

“Don’t stop me,” he begs, hoarsely through trembling lips as his eyes flit up to mine. The green glistens, pleading for this. For *me*.

I can’t move. I can’t speak. I can’t do a goddamn thing but stare down at him and watch in horror and desperate anticipation as his head drops forward, and he sinks his mouth over the crown of my cock.

The most certifiably insane feeling washes over me. An arousal so thick, it’s like someone just coated me in hot tar. I’m burning all over, my toes digging into the floor beneath me as Cyrus sucks on just the tip of my dick like it’s a lollipop.

God, his mouth is so warm and wet, plush lips treasuring me with such slight movement, it has my balls aching in an instant. He hums on me, then sucks down, taking more, settling between my legs to lean his body weight on me as he does. My cock is standing up straight and rigid, harder than it’s ever been before, I’m certain.

My eyelids droop as a swoosh of air leaves my lips. “Fuck… *yes*…” I can’t even help it. My hand reaches forward, fingers curling along his jaw.

He slurps down on me some more and I groan. But then my eyes snap back open when I remember where we are… In my office downstairs.

My fucking wife is upstairs. His mother is my wife. My wife is his mother… And she’s right up-fucking-stairs.

I begin to panic, my heart leaping behind my ribs. But Cyrus is lost in what he’s doing and clearly not having the same worries I am. He’s gripping my thighs, digging his fingers in as he moves his mouth all the way down on my cock, the head nudging the back of his throat.

“God damn,” I whimper, touching his neck and his silky soft hair. “*God fucking damn*.”

He moans on me and I’m falling the fuck apart, my hips chasing the velvety hot heaven of his mouth while he bobs on me, keeping it slow and hesitant, exactly the way I’d expect him to be. It just turns me on even more…

This kid… He’s so young, so timid. He’s so… sexy.

What the fuck is happening right now?

“Cy… You have to… stop,” I whine in between ragged breaths while his fingers slink into my pants to rub on my balls. My eyes roll back. “This is so bad… *Fuck*, that feels good. Play with them more.”

The vibrations of him moaning on my dick are something else, and I think I’m completely gone. I’m lost in a maze of need while he rubs up on my nuts, sucking me hard and so damn good. I can’t stop watching him, and I know this isn’t right. This is so fucking *wrong*, in fact. But the bad does absolutely nothing to dampen the pleasure he’s professing with that perfect fucking mouth.

I’m going to Hell.

Cy’s dark lashes flutter as he watches me, mouth full of my cock, eyes watering while he pumps me in and out. Then he pulls off and yanks my pants harder, licking a line down my cock and onto my balls.

His tongue dances on them, sucking one, then the other, panting and rumbling as he does.

“I like doing this for you, Tauren,” he whispers, sucking at my nuts like he wants to swallow them whole. “Am I doing good for you?”

My hooded gaze stays on his while I nod, the words fleeing my lips of their own volition. “You are doing *so good* for me, baby.”

His eyes droop shut, and he groans. Then moves back up my cock, licking circles around the crown. “Rub my dick… *Please,* Tauren. I’m aching.”

I’m so hot I’m melting, my balls drawn up and ready to burst as I lift my foot to rub his erection with it. I find it right away, stiff and long… Big and hard for me.

God, yes. I use my foot to graze his dick over his pants while he sucks and sucks on mine, deep into his throat until he’s gagging and spit is dripping from his mouth. My fingers slide up into his inky black hair and I pull, hard. Maybe too hard because he whines on my cock.

“That’s it, baby,” I breathe, holding the nape of his neck. “You’re doing so well. You’re taking this dick like a dream.”

He mumbles something I obviously can’t understand, and I’m about to break. Wound up tight, sweat glistening my flesh and my heart beating like a drum in my chest.

I don’t even know who I *am* right now. I don’t know what’s happening…

All I know is that this is euphoric. This feels perfect, and *right*, and fuck anyone who tells me otherwise. I’m two seconds from blasting off into the solar system.

Cyrus relaxes his throat while I stuff every inch down. My head falls back, and I tell him, “I’m gonna come, love. Swallow for me, okay?”

He manages a lazy nod, slurping and sucking, tongue holding my cock while I burst. My cum jets into his mouth, stream after stream of throbbing pulses filling his throat. Aiming my lust-drunk gaze back down at him, I watch his sparkling eyes, tears seeping from them while he swallows every last drop and I chew on my lip to keep myself quiet.

“So so good, baby,” I purr, gruff and growly, while my entire body buzzes, fingers trailing his sharp jaw. “You swallow cum like such a precious thing, you know that?”

His eyes flutter closed, and his head drops onto my pelvis, my dick still resting in his mouth. I go to tug back, but he doesn’t seem to want to let go. My fingers comb through his hair while we both breathe, silence and panting traveling in between the four walls that surround us.

Finally, he slides off and sits back on his knees, staring up at me with flushed cheeks, wet lips, and watery eyes.

My chest pumps as my gaze drops to the wet spot on his sweatpants.

He enjoyed that so much… Sucking me off.

I blink while my heart rate evens out.

My stepson…

Lips parted, I have no clue what words to speak. Cyrus stands slowly on shaky legs, then he leans over me and presses his soft lips to mine.

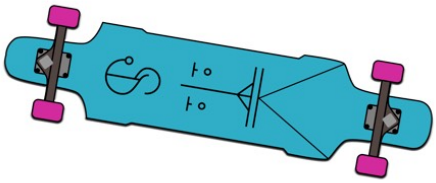
The kiss is brief; sweet, but electrifying all the same.

And he whispers, “Our secret.”

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CYRUS



K *nock knock knock.*

"Col?" I mumble through the door. "Are you driving to school, or should I skate?"

Silence is on the other side.

I'm about to turn around and just leave, but then I hear, "Come in."

Opening the door to my brother's bedroom, I step inside, immediately placing him. He's sitting on his bed, staring at nothing. My brow lifts curiously. *Maybe he's tired…*

"Are you going to school?" I ask again, growing a bit impatient. We need to leave now if we want to make it on time.

Colson just keeps staring off into space, until he finally manages a nod.

My forehead lines while I watch him. "Are you okay?"

That seems to snap him out of it. He blinks hard, then tilts his face up to look at me. He blinks again slowly, gawking at me for a solid three seconds before standing up and mumbling, "Let's go."

I wish I could say he's acting strangely, but he's always pretty weird. For as connected as we are, sometimes I really have no idea what's going on in his head. Which is unsettling, since he *always* knows what's happening in mine.

He grabs his backpack off the floor and stalks past me, out of his bedroom. I spin to follow him, my eyes landing on something by his dresser.

"Why do you have my Vans?" I shout, scurrying after him. "I've been looking for those!"

Of course he doesn’t answer me. We get downstairs and I scoop up my board on our way out the door, following him into the garage where we hop into our black Audi A4. Colson starts up the engine and we both buckle our seatbelts.

“Why have you been parking in the garage lately?” I ask.

“You’re just full of questions this morning, huh?” he grumbles while backing out of the garage. His eyes flit to mine and I shift in the passenger seat.

“Just wondering…” My gaze goes out the window as he drives us down the driveway and toward school.

He lets out an audible breath, then says, “I have one. What were you talking to Carey Culliver about the other day?”

My face springs in his direction. Even with his eyes on the road, it still feels like he’s glaring at me. Taking a moment to admire the sight of his long fingers wrapped around the steering wheel, I swallow down my uncertainties.

“He, um… was asking me if I wanted to hang out tonight,” I tell him.

“*Alone*?” Colson gasps, tone edging away from casual as he peers at me in his peripheral.

“No. As a group.” I fidget, my fingers twisting in my lap. “His friends think I should… come out of my shell. Have some fun…”

I would love not to look at him right now, but I can’t help it. My eyes slide up to his face, and I can see his jaw clenching. I *feel* him seething.

“Are you gonna go?” His voice is quietly dangerous, alarming in its softness.

I rest my head on the headrest. “I… I don’t know. They have a point. I mean, shouldn’t I have some fun? It’s senior year… *You* go out all the time.”

I witness him shifting in his seat, and it spurs my confusion. He’s uncomfortable and I’m not sure why.

“You’re better than the rest of us, Cy,” he mumbles. “Certainly better than *Carey Culliver* and his band of merry men.”

I can’t help but snort. His lips curl briefly, but he snuffs it. “I wonder what they even do…”

“I’m guessing they dance to Lady Gaga and make out with each other,” he scoffs, pulling us into the school parking lot.

We're both quiet as he finds a spot and parks the car. Now I'm up in my head, thinking about Carey and all his friends… About dancing and making out.

Colson turns off the engine and unbuckles his seatbelt. But before I can get to mine, he leans over me, grabbing my hand where it rests on the latch. His lips brush my ear and I shiver. "You can do whatever you want, good twin. But I just want you to remember… who you belong to."

His fingers circle my wrist, for just a moment, before he unbuckles my seatbelt and moves away, hopping out of the car.

My heart is jumping, head spinning like a top as I stay planted in the seat for a full minute in silence.



All I have to say is TGIF.

As much as I usually enjoy school, today dragged. I couldn't stop thinking about what Colson said in the car… How protective he is of me. How much he feels like he *owns* me.

My feelings on it are conflicted. On the one hand, I know it's bad. He's my brother and that should be the beginning and end of it.

But on the other… It gives me the tingles. The ones I think about at night when I'm alone in my bed. When I'm up wondering if tonight will be one of the nights he slips inside and proves that he's right.

He *does* fucking own me, and I think he always has.

I had a meeting with the graduation committee today to talk about my valedictorian speech. Our graduation ceremony is in two weeks, at which point I'll have to stand up in front of our entire class, all the faculty and the parents, and give a speech. Basically, it's an introvert's worst nightmare.

I'm honored to have been selected as valedictorian, especially since I missed almost a full year here. I guess it goes to show just how well I've done…

Top of my class, 4.0 GPA, and sailing to UCLA on a chemistry scholarship. I'm proud of my achievements, but giving a speech to our entire class feels sort of out of place for me. I don't fit in with any of those

kids, and I never have. It's the whole reason I've been chosen as valedictorian… Because I spent my time in school buried in education rather than attending pep rallies and football games. I haven't made connections in this school. *What on Earth do they expect me to say to these people??*

Speaking of, I'm on my way out of the office when I bump into Carey.

"Oh, hey!" he chirps, grinning wide at my awkward face. "There he is."

"Here I am," I mumble, unable to help the bemused lilt in my voice.

He simply shoves my shoulder. "You're so funny, you little grump." He chuckles, then raises his brow. "You coming to hang out with us tonight? My parents are gone, so we'll have plenty of privacy." I gulp and he slaps me on the shoulder again. "Don't look at me like that. It's nothing scandalous. Just some cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Casual shit talking."

I feel like the way my face is bunching up reveals how very un-casual this all sounds to me. I shake my head slowly. "I don't know if I can…"

"Cyrus." He tilts his head. "You know you want to." My own head just keeps shaking. "What did we talk about the other day? You coming out of your shell, you old turtle!"

He places his hands on my chest, and I'm sweating.

Picking lint off my clothes that I'm sure isn't there, he locks his chocolate eyes on mine. "How about I give you my number, and you can text me later if you change your mind?"

My wide eyes fling left, then right, then left again, triple checking for any sign of my brother. I know he'll positively hate the fact that Carey is touching me right now.

Good thing I don't see him anywhere…

My stomach flutters as people pass us in the hall. I don't think they're paying much attention to what's happening here, but it's still exhilarating for me. This is the gayest thing I've ever done out in the open… Stand close to another boy with his hands on my chest.

I bite my lip and nod slowly. "Okay. I'll take your number…"

Carey flashes those captivating dimples. "Great!" He holds his hand out expectantly, and my brow furrows. "Your phone, please."

"Oh… right," I stammer, and he chuckles.

I give him my phone and he enters his number, handing it back to me with a smirk. "I look forward to hearing from you, Sexy Cy."

He winks and then saunters off, leaving me standing in the middle of the hallway, clutching my phone like a total chick from a nineties high school movie.

I'm telling you. I'm literally the girl from She's All That *right now.*

Finally urging myself into movement, I shake it off and tuck my phone away, heading to my locker. Carey is really sweet for inviting me out and paying attention to me in general, but still, I doubt I'll go. Because even though I know it's probably something I *should* do, something I need to experience, I don't think I can bring myself to take the leap. It gives me mass amounts of heartburn to think about hanging out with guys who are clearly so self-assured and confident in who they are. They probably talk about sex and crushes all the time…

Two topics I need to steer clear of.

Grabbing my things from my locker, I move with the rest of the kids as everyone trickles into the parking lot. I spot Colson by our car, laughing with his dumb friends, his arm wrapped around the waist of this girl named Paris. She's the usual blonde bimbo he seems to attract, but I can't focus on that right now. I'm too busy wondering what happened to Annabelle…

Looking around, it doesn't take long to find her standing with a few friends and shooting some vicious glares at my brother and the new girl hanging all over him. I can smell the drama from here and I'm not even the slightest bit interested.

Brushing it off, I decide to skate home. I'm not in the mood to approach my brother when he's with his friends and the skanky girls he hooks up with.

And I'm not trying to give away how salty I am right now.

Hopping on my board, I cruise the parking lot down to the street when I hear a high-pitched squeal. I stop short and whip around, my mouth dropping open at the sight of Annabelle launching herself at Paris, ripping the girl's blonde extensions.

Colson and Charlie are attempting to pry them apart, and there's an immediate circle of people forming around them with their phones out. I have to chuckle while I shake my head, kicking and pushing myself down to the road toward home, no real desire to witness the catfight my brother is causing.

Typical Colson, driving people crazy.

At home, I come inside as usual, only this time I'm hyperaware that my mother isn't here, and won't be until Sunday night. It'll be just me, Colson… and Tauren.

Great. Me alone with the two people I shouldn't be left alone with.

Knowing Col, he'll stay out all night, purposefully defying Mom's request. Which would leave me alone with Tauren, and the awkward tension we seem to drum up together on occasion.

At that thought, my mind drifts to the other day in the kitchen, when I drank from his water bottle while he was half naked and wet, eyes darker than the cavernous depths of the ocean. I've been trying not to harp on it, and obsess the way I usually do, but it's difficult. I've interacted with Tauren a lot since Mom brought him home, but never once has it felt the way it did when his gaze fell to my mouth while I drank…

I'm sure it was nothing. I'm *positive* I was imagining the crackle between us like a lightning strike.

Actually, I think I know what's happening. I've become so enamored with the guy, I've somehow begun hallucinating sexually charged encounters. *I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this.…*

With disparaging thoughts puttering around in my head, I go to the kitchen for a snack. Rummaging through the fridge in search of something that isn't Mom's healthy shit, I finally settle on carrot sticks and ranch because it's literally the only thing with minor flavor that doesn't require cooking.

I'm standing at the marble island munching, reliving the feel of Tauren's fingers brushing mine as he handed me that water bottle, when I hear a noise. It's the back door sliding open and then shut. And footsteps.

My heart does a little leap in my chest, knowing it's *him*, most likely coming in from his afternoon surf. And sure enough, my stepdad saunters into the room, looking as gorgeous as ever.

He's in his wet suit fully this time, meaning his glorious chest isn't exposed. *Unfortunately.*

But it doesn't matter. I can still see the outline of his immaculately toned body beneath the black neoprene, his caramel-colored hair wet and slicked back, jaw stubbled and glistening with salt water…

God, he is fucking beautiful. It's really just unreasonable for a person to look so damn good, especially when said person is an older man who will never look at you the way you're looking at him.

Although…

I'm still fixated on the odd way he looked at me the other day. I know in that moment I was doing a pretty terrible job of hiding my crush, but he didn't seem repulsed.

In fact, he seemed… oddly invested.

It's stupid, I know. I'm a moron for even thinking he would ever look at me in a way that wasn't strictly stepdad-ish. Proven by how he was acting last night at dinner. And how he's acting right now…

He skirts around me to the fridge, a wide turn to ensure he doesn't get too close, like I'm contagious or something. Then he grabs himself a water and quickly darts away, my forehead creasing after him. He was curt and jumpy last night too, which is so unlike him. The only possible explanation is that I creeped him out.

We were too close the other day, staring too hard… And we crossed a line. He must have realized, from the way I was looking at him and my general nervousness in his presence, that I like him in a way I shouldn't. In an *un-stepson-ly* way.

It must have freaked him out. It's the only explanation for how distant he's been since. Last night was the proof. Not once did he ask about my day, what we did in chemistry, or how I've been liking some of the research I've been doing into my UCLA curriculum. I mean, shit, when I tried bringing up *Dune*, he barely even batted an eye. *And that's our favorite book.*

I know it sounds ridiculous and pathetic, but Tauren is my friend. One of the few real ones I have… I look forward to our conversations. And sure, I'm hopelessly infatuated with him, but I always hoped that wouldn't affect our relationship.

But clearly it did. It *has*. All because I fucked up and couldn't keep my sex eyes off his beautiful, glistening chest.

Watching him stomp away from me, I really loathe myself. *He didn't even say hi… I mean, what the fuck?? Was it really that bad?*

Making a snap decision, I follow him out of the room. "Hey."

Tauren stops with his back to me. His shoulders are all visibly hunched up by his ears as he breathes. I can practically feel the tension radiating off him in waves.

It takes a moment, but eventually he turns to face me. "Hey, Cy." His voice is low and despondent.

There are so many emotions in those two words, I'd need days to pick them all apart. And he won't even look at me, his eyes stuck on the floor as he sways in place.

What the hell is going on? How badly did I fuck up just by letting my guard down and getting close to him??

"How's it going?" I ask, desperately trying for our typical casual conversation. But he's still having trouble looking at me and I just don't get it.

"Fine," Tauren mumbles, rubbing the back of his neck. "Look, I… I've gotta grab a shower." He pauses and his eyes finally meet mine, the sparkly blue lined with discomfort. "I'll text you when dinner's ready."

Before I can even process what's happening, he's storming toward the stairs. And I'm just standing still with my head spinning for far too long. *I'm so confused…*

I really didn't think it was that bad, what happened the other day. I know Colson walked in on it, and Colson misses nothing, so I never expected him to just let it go. But still… How does that equal Tauren hating me?

I'm lost.

Staggering into the living room, I crash onto the couch and lie on my back, staring up at the ceiling. *What the hell am I supposed to do about this? How can I make things right with Tauren?*

I know I don't necessarily *need* to make things right with him… I should just leave it alone. Take it as a sign that I need to back the fuck off of him. This crush on my stepdad is becoming dangerous. I should be glad he's pulling away.

But of course I'm not. I'm miserable. I don't want him to shove me away. I want him to yank me closer. I know it's wrong, but since when has that stopped me?

Ugh. I hate myself.

Covering my face with my palms, I squeeze my eyes shut tight. My anxiety is rattling my nerves, trapping me underneath the weight of all my negative thoughts, like someone is shoveling dirt on top of me, burying me alive.

My own voice echoes inside my skull, telling me the things I already know…

You're such a loser.

What's wrong with you??

Why can't you just be normal?

You have no time machine, dumbass. You can't go back and fix the nerdy things you say and the pathetic ways you act.

You're a lame fucking joke.

My head aches with the pressure of holding back tears. Rolling onto my side, I bury my face in the couch and just lie still, my hand on my inhaler in my pocket. I don't think I'll need it. I'm more dreary than anything. Frustrated and just sick of feeling sorry for myself.

Rolling back over, I pull my phone out of my pocket instead, opening Instagram for some reason. I guess it's a distraction, and probably a new way of torturing myself. Either way, the first thing I click on is a story from Colson's best friend, Charlie. It's a video of a battered Paris making out with Colson while a bunch of idiots from school laugh and cheer and fuck around behind them.

As much as it irritates me, I watch it a few times. Colson doesn't look super into the girl or anything… But that never stops him from doing dumb shit like this, especially in front of his friends.

I hate that he sees himself as just another fuck-up, smoking and drinking and acting a fool. He's so much better than that…

Yea, well, what would you know? You don't even have friends. You're afraid to be yourself and it's pathetic. At least Colson is confident in who he is.

After the fifth time re-watching the video of my twin making out with a new girl, my self-loathing takes a turn. He's out having fun… And I'm home, being ignored by the only other person I thought understood me.

I'm so sick of being a loser. I'm sick of feeling left out.

Summoning some strength, I'm not even sure I really have, I pull up a text to my newest contact… Carey Culliver.

I'm sure I'll regret it, but fuck it. *Let's do this.*

Me: Hey… I guess I'm in.

He responds in less than a minute.

Carey: Yay for sexy Cy ;) Meet us at my place.

I take a deep breath and release it into the quiet room.

Looks like this loser is going out.

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COLSON



Music is fading into the background of my consciousness while I stare out at the ocean.

I'm at Charlie's house. A bunch of us are. His parents are gone for the weekend, and he's already launched into day one of what will definitely be a three-day event.

People all around us, my *friends,* are talking, laughing, drinking, and smoking. The sun is just setting, making a screen of blended color that's holding my attention more than the new blonde girl at my side.

Paris… She's been eyeing me for a few weeks, but I guess today was the day she decided to snatch me from Annabelle. She took some hair-pulling and an open-fist smack to the temple for it. It was pretty funny.

But now she's hanging all over me, and it's brining on that all-too familiar discomfort I spend so much time ignoring. *Just because I kissed her a few times, now we're getting married??*

It's ridiculous. *Give a guy some space.*

Really, my thoughts are lingering on things I'd rather not let them marinate in… My brother for one.

My stepdad for the other.

And far from finally, that vast dark presence that lives in my mind.

Last night was a victory for *Operation Good Twin*. That whole thing in Tauren's office was…

I should derail this brain-train before my mind can dreamily sigh the word *amazing*.

Paris’s sneaky fingers are grazing my abs, tracing the lines through my shirt with her acrylics. It tickles, but I don’t flinch. I’m too busy thinking. Remembering… *his taste.*

I swallow hard.

I don’t suck dick. I’m not into guys like that, so giving blowjobs isn’t something I do on the regular. Sure, I did it to Cyrus… Just to see what his face looked like when I slurped him over the edge. The sight is permanently etched in my mind. I’ll never forget it, just like how I’ll never forget the way Tauren looked when I did it to him last night. Even more, the hushed growls and whimpers I pulled out of him…

That’s it, baby.

You’re doing so good.

You swallow cum like such a precious thing…

My heart thumps and my chest narrows in a white hot delight, thick enough that it’s almost unbearable. But it’s not.

Actually, I think I like it… *A lot.*

The things Tauren said to me while holding my face, caressing my hair… Petting and praising me with his touch and his words and his tone…

It’s something I never knew I needed. For those brief moments, the dark stuff faded far enough into the background… and I felt *happy*.

It reminded me of how it feels with Cy. An unexpected *completeness*.

Blinking hard, I shake myself out of it. This is fucking bad, all of it.

From the first time I noticed it, the difference in the way Cyrus looks at me, when his brotherly appreciation turned to a mischievous forbidden lust… I knew I had to give him whatever it was he needed. He’s the only person who means anything to me in this world, so the fact that we’re *brothers* became irrelevant. In the immoral hidden corner of his bedroom, I give him what he’s been yearning for.

But realistically, I’ve always known it could never be more than that. Because I’m *straight*… I think. I guess I like girls. I mean, I always have. It’s who I am. But even outside of that, I *can’t* harbor real feelings for my brother. I might be a fuck-up in a lot of ways, but I refuse to drag Cyrus into the depths of evil with me. The things we do are done strictly out of necessity.

As much as I hate thinking about it, he’ll get over me eventually…

He’ll… move on. He has to.

I run a hand over my chest, thumb grazing the pain.

And Tauren… Same sort of concept, only reversed. I'm not helping him; I want to hurt him.

I'm *just* fucking with him. That's it. Pretending to be Cyrus in order to mess with his head. *That was the goal, right?*

I can't get caught up in whatever hypnosis he pulled on me last night in his office… With that long, perfect dick pulsing down my throat.

I clear it and tap my phone screen to life where it's been resting in my hand. I'm reclining on a poolside chair at Charlie's, with Paris still vying for more affection, when the only thing I've been doing is spacing out and scrolling social media.

The sun has disappeared as I let Instagram distract me, the party growing subtly rowdier now that darkness graces us. Charlie is shouting something about his bong he made out of a cantaloupe when I notice a new story from Carey Culliver. My jaw tightens as I recall how Cyrus told me he was invited to hang out with the princesses tonight.

Tapping on Carey's profile pic, I watch his stories, rolling my eyes multiple times while he documents his life. Taking selfies in school, coffee with some of his butt-buddies afterward, then getting ready for a night out.

I pause. There's a picture of one of his usual crew, Dom, posing in a room that looks like a kitchen, with what looks to be a martini in his hand. The picture is stupid, but that's not what has my eyes bugging.

In the background is a timid, black-haired guy I recognize as myself. Which could only mean one thing…

Cyrus. Cyrus is at Carey's house??

The picture was posted twenty minutes ago. Clicking onto the next story slide, my heart falls into my stomach as my hand clutches my phone so tightly it might snap in half.

It's a selfie of Carey and Cyrus together. Carey's face is right next to my brother's, and he's doing this sort of kiss face that makes me want to gut punch him until he pukes.

Cyrus actually went to go hang out with those clowns? Why would he do that??

I'm fucking seething as I flip my phone over on my stomach and yank my hair in my fists.

"What's wrong, baby?" Paris whispers by my ear. "Want me to make it better?"

Her tits are smooshing into my arm, a feminine floral scent overwhelming the general area, drumming up even more tension in my limbs. I should probably just hook up with her… To prove how little I care, about everything.

My brother, Tauren, their love for each other and mutual disregard for me.

Or I could go home and complete my master plan.

A chill runs through me. Tauren's home alone right now. Mom's in Malibu, Cyrus is out with fucking *Carey*…

Sitting up fast, I push Paris off me and tuck my phone away in my pocket, scrambling off the chair.

"Wait! Where are you going??" she squeals.

"Later," I rumble, stomping away.

I'm on a mission. I'm determined to make this the best damn switcheroo in recorded history.

I need to get to Tauren. He'll make me feel better.

Because of the plan, *I mean. Duh.*

"Yo, Col! You out?" Charlie asks as I'm making a beeline through his house to the front door, dodging drunk idiots with my pulse racing.

"Yea. Uh… I'll be back later," I lie. "I've got something to handle real quick."

And then I'm out.

I need to see this plan through.

Watch out, Tauren. Bad twin is coming for you.



OUR HOME IS dark and quiet, as usual.

I'm already dressed in Cy's clothes, fixed up and ready to play the part as I wander the downstairs in search of my stepfather. I don't find him in the kitchen, living room, or his office. But I keep looking, keep moving through our giant house, checking every room for any sign of him.

Finally, I spot him… And I have to take a second to remember to breathe.

He’s in the home gym, wearing only some fitted pants that must be for working out, because they’re exceptionally tight, showing off all the slopes of his legs and ass… his crotch. And his top half is barely covered by a sleeveless athletic shirt that hangs open at the sides, displaying his ink. Mainly the lion tattoo…

The one I haven’t stopped thinking about for two days.

I make an attempt at swallowing while I step inside the room, eyes locked on Tauren as he does deadlifts. Muscles… just *everywhere*. Flexing and glistening with just enough sweat to really highlight their dimensions

Suddenly, I’m overcome with a strong and strange desire to drop to my knees. It’s confusing me so hard my fists clench at my sides in frustration.

I decide to lean up against the wall and wait for him to notice me, which only takes a minute since there’s a mirror in front of him. When he sees me, his eyes widen and the flush of exertion on his face seems to deepen.

“Cy…” he grunts my brother’s name—*you know what they say about assuming. Right, Tauren?*—and drops the weight onto the floor. “What are you, uh… doing here?”

“I just wanted to say hi,” I mumble, eyeing him closely as he dabs his forehead with a towel

He simply blinks at me in the mirror, blue eyes shimmering through his blank expression, as if he hasn’t the slightest clue what to say to me. It’s good. It means I have the upper hand. *I need to keep it.*

Tauren doesn’t speak. He straightens and spins around to face me. His lips part. Then they snap shut.

I’m too impatient for the quiet, staring game tonight, so I whisper, “We’re alone, you know…” Then push myself off the wall, sauntering over to him, carefully, like he’s an animal who startles easily.

He stands stock still until we’re only about a foot apart, and then he ducks away from me. “I should go take a shower…”

I grab his arm to stop him. “Is that an invitation?”

Tauren turns back to face me, with his brows zipped. “Cyrus… I’m not sure what you think is going to happen, but we can’t—”

“What’s wrong?” I slide my fingers up the smooth, warm skin of his muscled arm. “You didn’t have fun last night?”

I witness his Adam’s apple bob in his throat and it’s such a fascinating sight. I find myself wanting to run my lips over the mound… Scrape the stubble with my teeth.

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep myself focused. *This is just an act, Colson. Get your head in the game.*

You're acting *like Cyrus… You aren't really him. You don't want this guy…*

"Whether I had fun or not is irrelevant," Tauren rumbles, his deep voice vibrating into me and giving me goosebumps. "This can't happen. It's beyond wrong…"

"And why's that?" The words flee my lips while I watch his mouth, captivated by the curve of his lips… They look so soft. Like puffy pink pillows I just want to nap on.

I bite my cheek even harder.

"Because you're my *stepson*, Cyrus," he says, the irritation in his tone snapping me out of it.

He sounds pissed, and I don't want his anger to hinder how badly I know he wants this. So I pull out some of my Cyrus moves, fluttering my eyelashes and tugging my lower lip with my teeth. His eyes drop to my mouth, his resolve visibly cracking, like when ice splits beneath too much weight. It gives me another surge of confidence.

"It must be exhausting," I tell him quietly, running my fingers hesitantly up his chest.

He grabs my hand to stop it, and I gasp. "What is?"

"Always being the good guy." My face tilts in closer to his, and to my surprise, he doesn't pull away. Our noses bump and I hear his breath hitch. "The *knight in shining armor*, here to save everyone…" Using my free hand, I resume running it up his neck, onto his jaw, savoring the scratch of his stubble beneath my fingertips. "Being good doesn't have to mean denying yourself, Tauren."

"Doesn't it…?" he breathes, zipping our bodies together, bringing so much heat to the air I feel like I'm standing on the sun.

My cock throbs and leaks in my pants as I press it into him, and he hums. "No. For example, I can be good for you… while doing something very bad."

I brush my lips over his and a soft, needy growl escapes him, the sound hitting me hard in the balls. But then he pulls away.

"No…" he protests, shaking his head a little, though we're still hanging onto each other for dear life. "We can't do this. You're too young… and I'm

m-married. To your mother.” My fingers slide down over his throat and he swallows again, this time so I can feel it. “This is so wrong…”

He’s grasping desperately at that mask he wears, I can tell. I can *see* him fumbling to keep it in place. If I breathe in the right direction, it’ll tumble off.

“Not the worst thing I’ve done…” I rasp to him.

And before he can speak again, I press my lips to his.

As soon as it happens, an instant chill rushes over every piece of my flesh. When our mouths touch, a million little tingles dance on my skin and my knees wobble.

It’s alarming. I haven’t reacted this way to a kiss since…

Pushing that memory—that *pain*—out of my head, I part my lips over Tauren’s, drawing him into it, taunting him to give in. He stays stiff for only a few more seconds before he concedes. And then he *melts* into me.

He opens wider, allowing me room to glide my tongue inside. When mine hits his, he shudders, and I feel him accepting it; giving in to what he wants. He seems to stand taller, exposing his true self as his hand lifts up to my throat and he grips me in place.

It’s the most arousing thing I’ve ever felt, him holding my pulse, tight enough that I’m instantly at his fucking command. I can’t help but press my aching erection into him while our lips move in an ebb and flow.

He sucks on my lower lip while taking my hand, which he’s still holding in his, and pressing it flat on his chest. The feel of that plane of rock-hard muscle beneath my palm gives me so many sensations… I can’t even think about them all right now. And the way he’s just taking control of me, moving me around where he wants… Sucking and tasting me, as if he’s enjoying a cool glass of lemonade on a hot summer’s day.

It’s too much… This feels… *too* good.

Ripping my mouth off his, I suck in some deep air. My eyes reopen slowly, as his do the same. And we stare at each other, chests heaving, confusion, and worry and endless lust rippling between our locked gazes.

I pray my hands aren’t shaking as I make this move, reaching up to slide my thumb over his plush lips. “When you’re ready to take off that armor… I’ll be upstairs waiting.”

Using every ounce of chill I have, I detach myself from him and saunter out of the room. I keep myself on cruise control while I walk to the stairs, then ascend them.

But once I’m sure I’m far enough away, I crash into the wall and cover my face with my palms.

Jesus Christ, what was that??

That was not just a kiss. There’s no way. It was so intense…

Rubbing my eyes, I try to compose myself. This is an act, a *game*. I’m controlling this, not the other way around.

Yes, kissing Tauren was unexpectedly fantastic, but I need not to think about that right now. Hopefully, my moves of seduction are good enough and soon he’ll be coming upstairs.

To Cyrus’s room. Shit.

Pulling my annoyingly jittery self together, I slink into Cy’s bedroom and look around. Usually when I’m in here, I’m with my brother. Not by myself… Pretending to be him.

Kicking off his shoes, I strip into just boxers, keeping my long-sleeved shirt on. Unfortunately, it’ll have to stay, to cover up my tattoos. Then I take my phone out of my pants and check the nightstand for a discreet spot to hide it. My fingers are trembling as I prop my phone in a place where it’ll be camouflaged enough, with the perfect angle of the bed.

Sitting down, I take a moment to breathe. I’m… *nervous*. I guess it’s a good thing, since Cyrus would definitely be nervous if he were doing what I’m doing. But still, I’m not actually him and I’m sort of freaking out, which makes no sense.

Maybe I’m just high on the adrenaline of this whole plan. The endorphins are rushing through my system, making all of this seem surreal. Believe it or not, it’s distracting me from my usual pain; the excessive chaos that typically stuffs me to the brim.

Right now, I feel clear. I’m determined and steady.

I crack my knuckles. *If my plan works, Tauren will come upstairs. And then we’ll…*

What will we do? Will we fuck? Or just hook up a little?

Thinking about any of it has my cock so hard it’s trying to burst out of my boxers, sweat breaking out at the nape of my neck. *Why am I getting so hard at the idea of hooking up with a guy??*

It’s just the plan, that’s all. I’m getting back at Tauren for being a brother stealing prick. And getting back at Cy for being hopelessly in love with our mother’s damn husband. When Tauren finds out it was me the whole time, he’ll…

Gulping, I shake my head and lie down on Cy's bed. *I don't know what I'm doing…*

Am I really going to hook up with my stepdad just to prove some kind of point? I mean… he's a *man*. I don't hook up with men.

Cy and I are a totally different thing that doesn't count. But Tauren is a grown ass *man*, who also happens to be married to my mother, who I just *kissed* downstairs. *Who might be coming upstairs to…*

My heart is thumping so hard my body is rocking as I pull in deep breaths to calm myself down. Minutes go by, and eventually I begin to worry. What if he *doesn't* show up?

What if he's not as desperate to be bad as I thought? The idea of him not showing up sends a sickening feeling into my chest.

This back and forth is exhausting me, and I force myself to breathe steadily while my thoughts spiral, like they always seem to.

I hate this. I thought he said it would stop.

Pulling the comforter over my lower half, I lie still for a while, just staring up at the ceiling. *I hope Cyrus is okay…*

Just as I'm finally relaxing a bit, a sound out in the hallway puts me on high alert again. Footsteps.

Reaching over, I press record on my phone as quickly as possible without knocking it over or moving it from prime recording location just as there's a soft rap on the door.

"Come in," I croak, then take another deep breath.

In walks Tauren, closing the door behind him. I gaze up at him from where I'm lying on my brother's bed, watching the glistening blue of his eyes as he steps closer, slowly and more timid than someone his size should be. But still, there's something dangerous in his eyes… Something almost predatory about the way he's stalking closer.

Once he's closer, I can see he's freshly showered. His hair is damp, and he's wearing those gray sweatpants paired with a white tee that hugs his muscles splendidly. He looks even better now, shadowed by the dimmed light of my brother's reading lamp. Swallowing my nerves, I stare up at him as he approaches the bed. I lean up on my elbows, preparing to sit.

He doesn't let me.

My stepfather climbs onto the bed, *over me*. His knees come down on either side of my thighs, his big body draping mine. The ocean blue of his eyes has grown significantly darker, arcane in its deep beauty. A large hand

slides up the length of me, from my hip all the way up my abs and chest, onto my throat. I'm instantly racked with chills, shaking down to my goddamn core.

"I don't know what I'm doing here…" he breathes, gazing down at me. "This is *so* bad."

I wouldn't be able to speak if I tried. I know this was my plan, but now that it's actually happening, I have no earthly clue what I'm doing. I feel stupid, and young, and…

"Is this what you want?" Tauren's mouth hovers over mine.

I can't even believe it, but my body is arching up to him. Completely on its own.

Yes.

Yes yes yes, I want it. I can't help it. I do.

I nod, unable to form actual words while he's pinning me down like this, his fingers curling around my throat.

"Use your words, Cyrus," he commands, cutting off circulation while he squeezes.

I'm dizzy already and it feels… Life-affirming.

I'm not Cyrus, but…

"Yes… please." I shiver, hoarse from how hard he's holding my throat. "I want this… *You*."

Tauren backs up enough that I can see his eyes again, releasing some pressure, the tightness on my face retreating while I drag in a breath. He eyes me carefully, my nerves bounding back. I'm afraid he'll be able to tell it's me…

I'm not Cyrus.

But instead, he licks his lip. "This has to be our little secret." Then he shifts his hips into mine and I gasp at the feel of his hard cock on my own. It feels much bigger than I remember. "No one can know… Do you understand?"

I nod fast, using every inch of my willpower not to glance left at the camera filming everything. "Yes. No one else will know. I promise."

"Good," he sighs out a raspy noise, and wastes no time dropping his mouth over mine.

This kiss is much more urgent than the one downstairs. It's hungrier; ravenous. Tauren's lips suck at mine ferociously, pulling the bottom, then

the top into his mouth, using his teeth to graze them until I'm panting and vibrating beneath him.

I've never been kissed like this before… It's like he's mollifying me. Taming me with his mouth. Like when you hold a cat by the scruff of its neck.

His tongue is warm and silky as it plays with mine, and he groans like this is something he's been wanting for a long time. The warmth it brings to my chest is overwhelming.

I need to get back on track here… *This is a game, Colson.*

Taking the material of his shirt in my hands, I slide it up his torso and rip it off him. Then I go for the pants.

"Greedy little thing, aren't you?" he purrs into my mouth. My cock is leaking all over the inside of my boxers. "Here…"

He helps me get his pants off, slithering out of them until he's naked above me and I'm burning alive. Then he takes my hand in his and presses it into his erection. I whine, and he groans, dropping his face into the crook of my neck.

"Jesus, that's good." His lips graze my throat. "Have you ever touched a dick that isn't your own? Before last night?"

I shake my head like an instinct, even though it's not exactly true. But I think he likes my response because he rumbles, his big body writhing into me while I jerk him slow. His dick is so *big*, thick and warm… velvety in my palm. It feels amazing to touch. I never want to stop.

"H-have you?" I ask him, out of nowhere, then flinch. I didn't mean to say that.

Tauren gazes down at me, eyes sparkling. "Once." Then a large hand moves between us to cup me over my boxers. "I've been dying to try it again." He slips his hand inside and my chest flutters with uneven breaths. "Baby…" His mouth inches over mine. "You're *so* big."

Baby.

"*God*…" I can't say anything else. I'm so hot I'm sweating through my clothes. I wish I could take them off, but then he'd know… The truth.

Tauren peels my boxers off, leisurely dragging them down my legs and tossing them away. But rather than coming back up, he stays down there, face aligned with my erection, which is so hard it's flinching on my abs, stretched, almost painful.

His gaze stays stuck on it while he licks his lips. “You’re leaking, baby.” His eyes flit to mine and my cheeks flush crimson. “Should we have a taste?”

I nod fast, but he simply blinks at me until I say, “Y-yes. Yes, please.”

His mouth curls at the corner. “Good boy.” And then he extends his tongue, lapping slowly underneath the crown of my cock.

My toes curl. “*Fuck yesss…*”

“Mmm…” he hums, then does it again, sucking the head into his mouth until I blurt out a garbled cry. “Delicious.”

He keeps licking and sucking on the tip of my cock, and I’m *dying*. It feels so good I might pass out, my hands fisting the blanket by my sides. Tauren takes them in his while he sucks on me, placing them on his face. *He wants me to hold his head…*

So I do. I fist his golden hair and keep him in place while he takes me deeper into his mouth, riding my cock with his tongue, grunting all the while. His hips are moving on the bed, chasing friction as he goes to town on me, spit overflowing onto my balls.

When he pops off, he licks down onto my nuts, just like I did to him last night. It feels sublime, and I can’t help how my legs are wrapping around his big body, holding him close to me.

Using his hands, he grips my ass cheeks and spreads me wide, moving his mouth in between.

“Holy fucking shit…” No one’s ever eaten my ass out before. The sensation is wild.

I’ve never done it to anyone either. *Not even…* I force the thought away to focus on the feeling of Tauren’s tongue swirling around and around my ass.

“How tight are you right here…” he mumbles, almost like he’s talking to himself. And the next thing I know, his finger is pressing into me.

I’m instantly tense. I don’t know why it never occurred to me that he’d want to put stuff in my ass… I guess I just didn’t make the connection. But I’ve never bottomed before. I mean, I’ve technically only had sex with a guy once, and he *loved* being the bottom.

Thoughts of him carry a shooting pain behind my ribs, intense enough that it causes all my muscles to tighten.

“Cy, let me in, baby,” Tauren demands in a soft and fuzzy tone, his tongue licking around where his finger is trying to get inside me. “You want

me to play with it, don't you?"

"Yes," I gasp on instinct.

Cyrus isn't here. Because *I'm* Cyrus…

And Cyrus would definitely want this.

So I relax as much as I can to accept the digit that's trying to break through. It's pretty small in the grand scheme, but still… It's the first thing that's ever been inside my ass. And it burns, but… I like it.

My muscles liquefy even further. *Oh… wow. I like it a lot.*

"More," I plead, legs spreading wider beneath him.

"What do we say?" Tauren pulls the finger out completely and I whine.

"Please. More, *please*."

"Mmm… Good boy. So polite, I think we should get you something…" His voice trails as his head lifts and his eyes drift around the room. His eyes go to the nightstand and my blood pressure spikes. "Better."

Scooting off me for a moment, he reaches literally right behind my phone that's recording, going for a bottle of lotion. Breaths are flying in and out of me while I watch him uncap the bottle and squirt some all over his hand.

The way his tanned muscles move when he bends and twists is such a fascinating sight. We're so different, it's kind of mesmerizing. I've only ever hooked up with a guy who looks just like I do.

This one is big, and visibly older. It's not a bad thing. Tauren looks great for his age, but still… He just looks like he could pick me up and toss me around. *Or pin me down.…*

"This is fucking crazy…" Tauren mutters while my head spins.

It's the truth. But it doesn't stop him from promptly sliding two fingers into my ass.

"Unnnggh." My head tips back as my stomach clenches, welcoming the intense burn of his two long, masculine fingers inside a tighter than tight spot nothing has ever entered before.

"*Jesus*… That looks good," he hums while pumping them in and out slowly. "Does it feel good, precious?"

"Yea…" I sigh when he brushes something that lights up every single nerve in my body. "Oh *God*, yea."

Tauren leans over me, pushing deeper, a rougher thrust of his hand that drives a groan out of me. If I'm not mistaken, I think he likes controlling my pleasure, but even more so when it's sprinkled with a little pain.

And I never knew it could be like this… But I'm obsessed.

"*Fuck*, this tight little channel…" he pants. "Imagine what it would be like to have my dick inside. Stroking all the way up in your warm, tight body."

My lashes flutter up at him. I bite my lip.

"I don't think I can do that, Cy." He shakes his head. "That's crossing a different kind of line…"

He's saying these things, but there's absolutely no conviction in his words. And I almost missed him calling me *Cy* for the umpteenth time.

This is happening. I'm making goddamn sure of it.

Wiggling my hips into his hand, I take his fingers as deep as they can go. The discomfort is… illicit. It feels like the best bad thing I could ever imagine.

The ultimate good bad.

"You want to," I purr, keeping our eyes locked. "You want to fuck me in the ass, I know you do."

Tauren growls and removes his fingers, replacing the two with three. I whine out loud. "You're too tempting, baby. You call to the wicked side of me… How do you do that?"

His hand keeps moving between my legs, slow but a sort of *hard deep* that steals my breath. And my ass is welcoming it all; the burn, the pain. I can't believe how much I love it…

And how *bad* it would be to have him fucking me. It's the most forbidden thing.

Just like me and Cyrus. It's the thing I'm not supposed to do…Take my stepdad's dick in my ass.

"It's what I'm here for," I whimper to him.

Our eyes remain locked while he fingers my ass, driving me completely insane with need. When I finally break our gaze, I watch his cock, bobbing between his legs, slapping mine every time he moves. That *massive* erection, so long and thick it could quite literally tear me apart.

The thought has me clenching all over.

Finally, Tauren pulls his hand from between my thighs, staring at my ass while he does. My cheeks burn with humiliation; the shame of knowing he's seeing me like this…

This must be how Cyrus felt…

I never knew I would like it, too.

Tauren reaches for my shirt, and instant panic sweeps over me. I grab his hand to stop him, shaking my head. “I want to leave it on. Please…” He gives me a bemused look, but I ignore it by pushing him down onto his back. Crawling over him, I bring my lips to his ear. “I’ve wanted this since the first time I saw you.”

His strong hands slide up to my waist and he holds me, burning me with his warmth. “I’ve… I’ve wanted it, too.”

Something about the way he says it melts me inside. Until I remember he thinks I’m my brother…

My brother who’s *mine*.

My jaw sets. Reaching for the lotion, I squirt out a generous amount, stroking it onto his many inches. His eyelids droop and he groans, hands sliding down to cup my ass, squeezing it. Once his erection is lubed up, I straddle his hips, admiring the sight of my cock on his abs.

“I can’t believe we’re doing this.” He trembles, spreading me open wide.

“Me neither,” I tell him, quivering right back.

My confidence is wavering. But my excitement exceeds it in triplicate.

I want his dick inside me. I grip it in my fist and position myself to take him in. It’s not easy at this angle, not that I would know since I’ve never done this before. But it takes many moments of nudging before finally I relax enough to slip my hole down over the fat tip of his huge cock.

“Uhhfuck,” I whimper, pained but somehow loving it.

“*Babyyesss*…” he mumbles nonsense, pulling me down farther by my ass.

He spears me with his dick, sliding me down on him until I’m seated with every inch burrowed inside, so deep it’s about to come out of my mouth.

“*God*,” I choke, practically falling down on his chest while he holds me up.

“You did it, baby,” he whispers to me, remaining still as I adjust to his size. “Every inch of me is in your tiny little ass. You’re doing *so well* for me, love.”

Nodding sleepily, I push myself up on my knees a bit, sliding up his erection, just enough for it to brush that spot. I release a garbled hiss, slapping my palms down on Tauren’s pecs.

“Time to ride, gorgeous.” His hands glide down my thighs. I’m hesitating, unsure of how I’m going to move because good *God* it hurts, even when it feels like bliss. “You’ve got this. Use that sweet ass to worship my cock, baby.”

His words of praise drive me to move my hips, swiveling a bit. When I do, a bolt of lightning zaps my loins and I whine.

“That’s it, love,” he groans, voice cracking. “Make yourself feel good. Use my dick to get off.”

Moving again, I lift myself, dragging my ass up his shaft, then pressing back down. My motions are slow, gradual, but it takes me only a few more minutes of adjusting before I’m fucking *riding* him.

“Yesss, baby. Yes baby yes baby yes.” Tauren is mumbling words, holding me so hard I’ll definitely have bruises while I work his cock in my ass, chasing the most vibrant feelings I never knew I could experience.

“Tauren,” I whine, Cyrus’s bed creaking with our rapid movements.

“Yea, gorgeous. Keep fucking my cock.” He graces me with filthy words that drive me crazy. “Choke my cock with that warm, tight cunt.”

Garbled cries flee from my lips while I grip his chest, pushing and pulling and humping the life out of my stepfather, with no goddamn recollection of how we got here or how this happened.

It’s all about the sensation. The *feeling* of this. The utter beautiful, graceful dance of us fucking. Becoming *one*.

“I… I wanna come,” I mewl to him. “I wanna come on your cock.”

Tauren makes an animal noise and suddenly sits up, putting us nose to nose. Abruptly, he grabs my face and kisses my lips, fiercely licking and sucking at my mouth, feeding me his tongue while pumping his hips up to mine, giving me every inch of his huge dick until he’s up in my fucking guts.

“Come for me, baby,” he commands, biting my lip so hard I taste blood. “Come on your stepdad’s cock.”

My eyes roll back in my head.

My ass clenches.

And I erupt.

Blowing my load in the longest, strongest, most violently wonderful pulses while I sob into the mouth of my mother’s husband.

Tauren fists my dick and strokes it gently, milking out every drop while he nips down my jaw, sucking my pulse so hard I know he’ll leave a mark.

But I don’t give the tiniest fuck. This is the most stupefying pleasure I’ve ever experienced. I’m *high*, floating up into the air, cruising the clouds.

“Good boy,” Tauren breathes, clutching my near-lifeless body while he continues to pump into me. “You come so good for me, gorgeous. You come like a dream with my cock inside you.”

He quickly shoves me onto my back and grabs my legs, holding them around his waist while he pounds into me, over and over, grunting and growling like a feral beast.

It hurts, but the pain stirs me up once more… Cum is just *flowing* out of my dick uncontrollably while my stepfather ruts into my ass, harder, harder, and harder.

“God, baby, I’m gonna come deep in your pretty ass,” he snaps, gripping my shirt in his fist. “I want your hole *overflowing* with me.” And then he shoves himself so deep I think even his nuts are inside me.

I cry out loud as he splits me in half, and I feel him… *pulsing*.

“*I’m coming… I’m coming I’m coming,*” he sings into my neck, hips still as he drains himself as deep as my body can take.

My cock throbs out even more cum between our hot, sticky bodies.

“Baby… *yes*,” he sighs, breathless, hoarse, sounding like he just screamed for hours. Who knows, he might have.

We both probably did.

Tauren’s fingers stroke in my hair, his lips grazing the sweat-kissed flesh of my throat. And then he pauses. We both lie still, just breathing, my ass holding his dick as it softens, my own sticking to his abs.

I’m amazed at how peaceful I feel… I don’t think I’ve ever felt so utterly content. It’s miraculous.

My fingers brush down his back as I savor it, this feeling of pure joy.

But then Tauren gets up. He peels himself off me and pulls out, detaching from my body as he swallows visibly, blinking down at me.

The blue in his eyes goes from sparkling wonder to mortal dread in seconds flat.

Quickly stumbling off the bed, he scoops up his clothes, jumping into them while I attempt to sit up, wincing over the soreness.

Tauren clears his throat. “That will never happen again.”

My lips part, though I’m not sure what I’d say. Maybe argue? Or tell him I agree.

It doesn’t matter because nothing comes out. And without another word, he leaves. He *bolts*, diving out of the room like it’s on fire.

What the fuck just happened…?

I sit on Cy’s bed in stunned silence for all too long, staring at the door he just left through. Once the dust has settled, it’s like I’ve sobered up. And I feel like a fucking moron.

But I shouldn’t. I shouldn’t care that he left like that… After all, I got what I wanted.

Speaking of, I reach over to stop the video. My phone recorded the whole thing… It’s my proof. My evidence. My gift for Cyrus, so he’ll finally see… *Tauren’s not as good as he seems.*

It’s getting late, anyway. I need to get out of Cyrus’s room in case he comes home.

Standing up on shaky legs, I get dressed, squirming at the feel of my stepdad’s cum dripping from my ass while I strip Cy’s bed and make it up with clean sheets. I go to my own bathroom and take a shower, moving on autopilot while I scrub and scrub myself.

And once I’m settled in my own bedroom, I stare into space for all too long.

I got what I wanted. So why does this night feel like a fucking disaster?

Why does it feel like I just made a huge mistake? Or like… I was *the mistake*.

The bullshit bounding through me is too much. My chest hurts and I *hate* this. I despise feeling this way… Like I’m unsure of everything. It makes me itchy all over and I can’t breathe.

Ripping at my hair with my fists, I wish I wasn’t sober right now. I don’t want to fucking deal with this…

Yet another mess made by Colson the walking disaster.

I let a *man* fuck me… My *stepfather*. *What the hell was I thinking??*

I’m straight. I like girls. End of story.

I fucked the guy Cyrus is basically in love with… And no, it’s not me. *Even though I guess I did fuck myself in the process.*

I’m just such a fucking worthless idiot. Why do I do these things?

Fuck this. He doesn’t want me here, and I don’t want to be here either. I’m going back to Charlie’s.

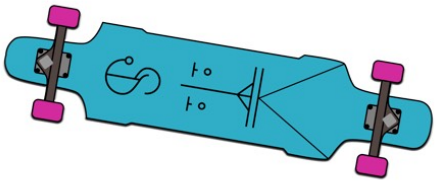
Back to get fucked up with my stupid friends. Because that’s all I’m good for.

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CYRUS



I *knew this was a bad idea.*

"It doesn't matter what he says." Carey flicks his wrist in Josh P.'s direction. "He's a scrub. Thank you, next. Amiright??"

He turns his hazy gaze on the rest of us, all seated around his living room fireplace. But I know he's not expecting a response from me… I've barely said three words since I've been here.

Travis and Dom nod along in agreement with Carey's assessment of the guy Josh P.'s been dating. He goes to another school, so I don't know him. But apparently, he's a *scrub*.

Whatever that means.

I've been trying to sort of fly under their radar at this gathering, although it seems like the more they drink, the more they're expecting me to transform into someone more like them. And it's not happening.

That and I'm stone sober. I really don't like alcohol, so I took one sip of the Cosmo Victor made me and gave up. I've been pretending to nurse it, while subtly dumping little bits into Josh R.'s glass when no one's looking.

"Victor, you little slut!" Carey calls out after slugging down the remains of his fourth glass. "Make me another drink." His gaze slides to me. "And Cyrus needs a refill, too."

I shake my head. "No, no, I'm fine. Thanks."

"Make him a drink," Carey slurs, handing his empty glass to Victor when he comes over. He snatches mine out of my hand.

"You know, bitch, I'm not your personal bartender," Victor hisses at Carey on his way out of the room.

"*Meow*." Carey grins after him, before whipping his face back in my direction. "So… Cyrus, my dear, have you hooked up with any straight boys yet?"

And just like that, my stomach drops out of my body and goes *splat!* onto the custom rug. My pulse gains speed at an abnormal rate and I *feel* my face go ashen while my entire life flashes before my eyes. More specifically, that night when I was fifteen…

Oh God, I'm back in Jared's basement all over again.

How has it been years, *and I'm still the same lame loser I was back then??*

Even worse is the fact that they're assuming I'm gay, which they've basically been doing all night. I mean, I *am*… but still. No one actually knows that, which means I'm not as sneaky as I thought I was.

Thinking about his question, my mind drifts instinctively to Colson. But I shut that down quickly and shake my head. "Uh, no…?"

"Oh, come on," Carey sneers. "It's a rite of passage for gay teenagers." His eyes flit to Dom, who nods, grinning wickedly.

"But I'm… I'm not…" My voice switches off as sweat breaks out on my forehead.

I'm becoming lightheaded, gasping for air. *Subtly*, so they can't tell I'm having a goddamn panic attack, though I'm terrified if this keeps up, I might need my inhaler.

The four of them share quick looks of concern as Carey scoots in closer to me on the floor. "Sweetheart, it's okay to be gay. You know that, right?"

"Carey, leave him alone," Travis mutters. "The poor thing hasn't even come out yet. He doesn't need to be dragged out of the closet by the likes of you."

My lashes flutter a million times at them, words lodged in my throat about to come up like bile. But I swallow them down and stand up fast, mumbling, "I should go…"

This is *just like* that night at Jared's, only a million times worse. Because these are my gay peers who are judging the fuck out of me right now, and I seem like a total pussy.

A tragic waste of breath.

I hear the voice in my memory, calling me *pathetic* as I dart away from them.

“Cyrus! Wait.” Carey jogs after me, his hand wrapping around my arm to stop me before I reach the foyer. “Don’t leave. I’m sorry I crossed a line…”

“It’s not your fault, I just…” My head wobbles over and over, eyes set on our feet, so I don’t have to look at him. *Why am I such a coward??*

“You’re scared. I get it,” he says sympathetically. “I was, too. We all were.”

My chin tilts, gaze rising hesitantly to his chocolate brown irises. “I doubt that...”

Carey laughs softly. “Believe it or not, we weren’t always this fabulous.” His smirk widens as I roll my eyes, to which he chuckles again. “I mean, *assured* of who we are. It takes time.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever get there,” I huff. “In case you haven’t noticed, I’m not like you guys.”

“Well, you are in one way…” His brows lifts and I simply blink at him. “You’re gay, darling.” My lips shiver and my head shakes again. But he presses his finger to them before the standard denial can spill out. “Cyrus… You *are*. Aren’t you?”

He just stares at me, waiting expectantly while I take in a deep breath.

And I nod.

Even that one small movement feels *monumental* right now.

Carey smiles, his hand sliding down my arm until our fingers are linked. “See? That wasn’t so bad.” Ignoring my heart jumping wildly in my chest, a grin curves my mouth. “It gets much less scary when you finally admit it.”

Our eyes stay locked while I muster up just a little more courage. I know it’s there… I *know* I have it.

There’s a part of me that is strong. A section of Cyrus Becker more assured of who he is. Sometimes he feels like a different person than me. But he isn’t.

He’s *me*, in another form.

So I channel my inner Colson, the strong one of the two of us. And I mutter, “I’m… gay.”

Immediately, my eyelids fall shut and I let out a soft chuckle. A million pounds of weight have just drifted off my shoulders, with just those two words. *That was it?? That wasn’t difficult at all!*

Why have I been fearing this so much? Fighting it, when it’s as easy as just saying the words.

Suddenly, Carey's fingers are on my jaw. And the smile drops from my lips.

What's happening…?

He leans in. I gulp.

Oh my God, what—

He presses his lips to mine. And I *freeze*, like a gay statue.

His lips are soft, and his mouth is warm as he kisses me slowly. And I just fucking stand there like a moron.

I… can't do this.

I'm… I belong to…

My eyes close for just a moment while I let this boy kiss me. My first time kissing someone who isn't part me. It feels… okay. Nice.

But then, behind my eyelids, I see Tauren.

I see Colson.

They're the two people I have feelings for, and it's awful because I can't have either of them. No wonder I haven't been in a rush to come out. It won't make any difference.

I'll be forever stuck kissing boys I could never love as much as either of them.

My eyes spring open, and I pull away from Carey. "I'm sorry. I… I do have to go. Thanks for having me."

Dashing away from him before he can say anything, I'm practically jogging to the front door and out of the house. Grabbing my longboard outside, I jump on and cruise, away from Carey's house. Away from the party I knew I didn't want to attend, though it actually ended up being sort of helpful.

I finally admitted that I'm gay. I finally *said it,* out loud, to human people.

Now I want to say it to Colson, though he already knows. But I've never actually spoken the words to him.

I want to say it to Tauren. The sudden desire to tell him is so powerful, I'm kicking and pushing faster and faster down the street. Carey lives a few miles from our house. I'd planned on taking an Uber home, but at this rate, I can probably skate home faster.

So I can tell him…

Tauren is like the father I always wanted. The father my actual father never was. Which makes things even more complicated because of my

undying attraction to him.

But all that can wait right now. Tonight, I need him as a father figure.

I'm going to come out to him like I probably never will to my actual dad.

When I reach the house, I'm out of breath and excited. I'm nervous, but anticipation ripples through me as I whip open the front door and prop up my board.

The house is quiet and dimly lit, since it's after midnight and I doubt Colson is home. But that's okay. I can talk to him tomorrow.

For now, I need to find…

"Tauren," I whisper his name as I spin into the kitchen, my eyes landing on his large frame where he's standing by the marble island.

Standing isn't really the right word… He's sort of hunched over with his face buried in his hands. He looks upset; devastated, in fact. And when he lifts his face, his eyes shine at me with something like remorse.

And fear. He's giving me a look like he's afraid of me.

My brows zip. "Are you okay?"

He shakes his head slowly, combing fingers through his hair. "No, Cy. I'm not okay."

"What's wrong?" I ask, stepping farther into the room. Closer to him.

His eyes widen, and he steps back. *Away* from me.

Now I'm really confused… "What… happened?"

"Cyrus." He holds up his hand, and I stop moving. "Please. I really don't think we should… get close to each other again. It's very bad."

My mouth falls open, but I haven't the slightest clue how to respond. I'm baffled right now. I don't understand why he's acting like I have the plague.

Is this still about the weird tense moment we had the other day?? Was it really that serious?

No… no no no. I refuse to believe that I ruined everything just by having these feelings for him. I didn't mean to.

I *need* him.

"Tauren, about what happened…" I force my voice to project. "I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." His face is blank while he stares back at me, eyes wide. "You're too important to me. I don't want it to be weird between us. Our friendship is *too* important…"

"Friendship…" he whispers.

“Yea.” I nod. “I mean, yes, you’re my stepfather, but what I have with you is more than anything my real father’s ever done for me. You’re so kind and generous… caring and genuine… Tauren, you’re just… Well, you’re fucking awesome.”

A subtle smile pulls at his mouth, prompting a chuckle that puffs from between my lips at how damn good it feels to open up. I’m being honest for the first time in pretty much my whole life and I’m high on it.

“*You’re* awesome,” Tauren says quietly, stepping forward.

My smile widens. “And I wanted to tell you something… Because I feel so comfortable with you. Because you mean so much to me. I wanted you to be the first to know…”

Tauren steps forward again, and again while I’m speaking, slowly inching himself closer to me. Closer than I expected, until we’re less than a foot apart and I can feel his warmth.

Swallowing hard, I try my best to ignore all of it. How good he looks, and smells, and feels when he’s next to me. Because I’m trying not to think about that right now. I’m trying to see him as a father figure, not a crush.

But he’s leaning in even closer. Tugging his lower lip with his teeth…

Reaching out and placing a large hand on my waist.

Everything is in slow motion while I glance down at the hand. Then back up at him. My eyes have probably never been wider.

“What do you want me to know, Cyrus…?” he whispers, *crazy* close to my mouth.

I can’t even remember what I wanted to tell him. This is *bizarre*. He was just running away from me, telling me we shouldn’t get close because it’s *bad*…

But now he’s touching me. Looking at me like he might want to…

No. That makes no sense. Why would he…

“Tell me, baby.” His lips brush over mine and I shiver so hard I’d fall if he weren’t sort of holding me up.

“*Baby*…?” Is all I can say, on a gust of breath.

I’m so confused. *What is happening right now??*

And how do I make sure it never stops?

“This stuff we’ve been building,” he hums, sliding that perfect hand up my back, “it’s impossible to ignore. I told myself to shut it down… After what we did. I told myself it could *never* happen again. But then I feel this…”

I’m lost at his words. I wish I could understand what he means; what in the holy fuck he’s even talking about. But he’s touching me… running that strong hand all over, his masculine scent clouding up my brain. Blue eyes shining, zoning in on my mouth.

It reminds me of those dreams I used to have… About Batman.

The first time I realized…

“I… I’m gay,” I mumble out of nowhere, caught like a deer in headlights by his pillowed lips inching over my own.

“Yea,” he purrs. “I think I might be, too.”

And then he kisses me. He’s fucking *kissing me.*

My *stepfather*. Tauren Vance… is sucking on my lips, softly devouring me like I’m a food he’s allergic to, but can’t stop himself from savoring.

“So sweet,” he mumbles into my mouth, pushing me against the island, his hands gripping it on either side of my hips while he traps me in place. “Goddamn, it’s like you get sweeter and sweeter by the minute.”

My head is fucking spinning. *Where is this coming from?*

Giving myself up to whatever the hell is happening in this dreamland, I part my lips and welcome his tongue, kissing him back. The second guy today, which is fucking wild. *Who am I??*

I’ve lost all rationale. I’m kissing my *stepfather*. First my brother and now him…

Why am I so damn attracted to the people I can’t have? Why do I get a million times harder when I know it’s *wrong*…

We’re standing out in the open, kissing. Anyone could see.…

Sure, Mom is gone. But Colson…

Where’s Colson? If he sees this, he’ll freak out.

Using every bit of strength I have, I pull back; pull away from Tauren’s advancing mouth, his tongue and his delicious taste I just want to drink up forever.

“Um…” I stutter, placing my hands flat on his chest while my mind whirls and my dick throbs.

“I’m sorry… Fuck, this is so bad.” He steps away, rubbing his eyes hard with his fingers. “I said I wasn’t going to, and then you come in and I just… lose my head again.” He blinks at me. I do the same. “I should go.”

“*Go*…? Go where?” I gasp.

He shakes his head. “I have some thinking to do. I’m… I’m lost, Cy. I’m so sorry…”

And then he stumbles away. And I'm left standing in the kitchen, wondering what the fuck is happening in my life.

What the fuck is this mess, other than…

Bad bad bad.



I'M AWAKENED from a foggy dream at the sound of someone stumbling around in the hallway.

Blinking myself back to reality, I lift my head as my door creaks open. It's dark enough that I can't tell who's there, but my stomach is instantly bunched up at the idea that it could be Tauren… Coming back to finish the kiss we confusingly started downstairs before he bolted to *somewhere* and I came upstairs to fall asleep.

I rub my eyes. "Is it you?"

"What? *Fuck*—" The grungy voice instantly tells me it's not Tauren. It's my brother, stumbling around my room, tripping over things.

He lets out a giggle, and now it's painfully obvious that my twin is wasted. *So… This will be interesting.*

"Col… what are you doing?" I sit up as he crashes onto my bed. I scoot away, trying to put space between us, but he just rolls closer to me.

"I wanted to make sure you're okay," he slurs, slinging an arm over my waist.

My heart is thumping pretty hard just from feeling him so close to me, his scent, like cinnamon booze and cigarettes, invading my space. It's heady, his entire presence. The most tranquil yet somehow dizzying sensation is having Colson nearby.

"Why wouldn't I be okay?" I ask while he nestles himself up to me, letting out a long breath.

"I don't know…" he hiccups. "You went to Carey's." I freeze, tension suddenly weaving through all my muscles. "I wasn't sure if maybe you had your first orgy or some shit."

He giggles again, but I can hear the unease behind it. Feel it even worse.

“Hardy har har.” I spin away from him. But this time he grabs my biceps and holds me in place, crawling over me. I swallow hard at the feel of his thigh between mine, grazing my hardening flesh. “Col… don’t.”

“What’s wrong? You don’t like me anymore?” He rests his body weight on me, the green in his irises sparkling like jade. “You got a boyfriend now…?”

“Why are you being crazy about Carey?” I huff up at him and he rolls his eyes. “You hang out with people all the time… You fuck girls all the time. But I’m not allowed to go near anyone… It’s not fair.”

He stares at me in silence for a full minute before muttering, “Life isn’t fair, good twin.” Then he leans in closer, until his lips are a breath away from mine. “So… did you hook up with him?”

Choosing not to mention the kiss right now, I shake my head. “No. Not that it should matter.”

“Of course it matters.” His fingers slide up my chest, onto my throat. “You’re the good twin for a reason, Cy. I’m the fuck-up, but you… You need to stay pure.”

I can’t help the little gust of a laugh that bursts from my lips. Colson’s eyes shine, the corner of his mouth twisting into such a blazingly beautiful smile… The one reserved for those rare vulnerable moments.

Naturally, he crushes it as fast as it appeared, covering it up with his usual scowl. “Are you mad…?”

My brow furrows. “Mad about what?”

“That I ruined you…” he hums, shifting on top of me until I grunt. “That I deflowered you when you were saving yourself for someone special?”

Breath catches in my throat, and I remember the night we both gave in for real.

The honeymoon.

It hasn’t happened since then. It’s been months, and aside from the occasional blowjob—for him, not for me—we haven’t really touched each other.

It should be a good thing. I *should be* relieved not to deal with the internal stresses of worrying about how much I want my twin brother to fuck me senseless. But it doesn’t feel right.

It sours my stomach and aches in my bones. I need him deeply, and I don’t want to. It would make everything so much easier if I could just wish

it away. But I can't.

I know he's jealous, and possessive, but I honestly don't think it's because he feels the same way I do. He just thinks he needs to own me as a justification for what we do. That's why he's been so crazy over my feelings for Tauren. It makes him feel better about the good bad… To make himself the *only* bad.

"It doesn't matter," I mumble an answer to his question, and his gaze narrows. "Nothing could or would or ever will happen between me and Tauren. Don't you get that?"

A surge of confidence, muddied with rage, slithers through my limbs and I sit up fast. Colson backs up until we're nose-to-nose, blinking at me, like a mirror image. He's looked more like me in the last few days than ever before… Having lost the black nail polish, brushing his hair out of his eyes for a change.

It's startling… And in some sick corner of myself, a place I push away as much as humanly possible in my struggle to keep the disease in me from spreading… I like it.

I *like* watching myself kiss and touch me. It turns me on when the wicked version of me takes control.

"Tauren is married to Mom, Col," I tell him with certainty. "Whatever he does, or thinks, or hides from the rest of the world is irrelevant." I pause and swallow at the memory of Tauren's lips on mine just downstairs… When he said he thought he might be gay, too. I don't know what that meant, but my point stands. "He's our *stepdad*. Period. That's the unfortunate end to it."

Colson's Adam's apple bobs in his throat. His eyes, shimmering gems in the low light, stay with mine, holding my gaze in an identical lock for weighted seconds, before he eventually sits back.

For a moment, I think he's going to get up and leave, and my chest is filled with regret. But he doesn't. Instead, he slinks his hand into the pocket of what looks like *my* black jeans, and tugs out his cell phone. He zones in on the screen, pulling something up while I just sit and stare at him, wondering what the hell he's doing.

He hands me his phone, and I take it hesitantly. I'm anxious about what he wants to show me, and when I peer at the screen, it looks like a video is playing.

It's a recording of the very spot we're sitting in right now. My bed.

At first, it looks like I'm lying on the bed, wearing only my boxers and a long-sleeved black shirt. I look nervous, but there's something about the image that's… unsettling.

That's not me. That's him.

Bemused, I glance up at Colson. "Why are you in my bed… wearing my clothes?"

"Just… watch."

The suspense is growing in my gut as I keep my eyes on the screen. Only a moment later, someone else comes into the frame.

A gasp flees my mouth, like a whoosh of disbelief as I watch Tauren—our *stepfather*—crawling over my brother, on *my* bed.

What in the hell…??

I'm baffled, my bugging eyes jumping up to my brother's face, then back down to the phone screen, unable to stop watching for more than a split second for fear of missing something. Things are progressing pretty fast in this video. Tauren is leaning over Colson, brushing his lips with his own.

"What the fuck is this?" Hoarse words croak from my throat. "What… why… how…?"

I gasp again when Tauren kisses my brother. I can *feel* it on my mouth even now… The force of his warm mouth and soft lips has been lingering since our kiss downstairs.

So he kissed me… and *Colson??*

I'm fucking speechless. My jaw actually hurts from having dropped so hard, just hanging open the way it is, in utter shock. My wide eyes stay glued to the screen of my brother's iPhone, taking in the video of Tauren Vance… stripping fucking naked.

"This isn't real," I grunt, running my hand over my chest. Something inside hurts… It feels like a terrible stabbing ache, right where my heart is. If this is jealousy, it's more painful than any I've felt before. "You… you fabricated this. Like, photoshop or…"

"It's real, Cy," Colson mutters. "Tauren fucked me tonight. A few hours ago…" My eyes spring up to his and I gawk at him, a swift migraine instantly pumping my temples. "He put his dick in me, right here, on this bed."

"I… I…" I have no idea what to say.

I'm *devastated*… but…

Colson leans in closer to my face, the sharp sweetness of smoke and bourbon on his breath as he whispers, “He fucked me thinking I was you.”

I’m shaking down to my core. I peek down at the phone again to find Tauren between my brother’s legs, sucking his dick. My own erection is pushing against my pajama pants, my balls throbbing at the sight.

Tauren… Mom’s husband… The straight *guy…*

He’s sucking a cock. And *holy fuck* does he look good doing it.

I swallow down my scratching throat, blinking as Tauren moves his mouth lower. “He… thought it was me?”

A tingle rushes up my spine. The jealousy is still there, yes, but it seems to be coated in some very interesting warmth. The hurt I’m feeling at watching Tauren with my brother is fervent, but…

Knowing he thought it was me… It explains so much.

That must be why he kissed me downstairs… He thought we’d just had sex upstairs. That’s why he said, *You get sweeter by the minute.*

Electric currents flow through my veins. On the screen, Tauren is using lotioned fingers on my brother’s ass, and my face is so hot, it could melt right off.

I glance at Colson. “You did this…? You let him…” My voice cuts out while he gives me one of his scowls. My brother, who’s always insisted he’s straight, let Tauren Vance fuck him. “Why?”

His jaw flexes. “To fuck with him.”

I’m dangling by a thread here. *This is crazy…*

There are so many emotions bounding through me, I haven’t the slightest clue how to process this. But when I look at the screen, I’m completely floored. Tauren looks tho*roughly* devoted to what’s happening. I can’t even believe it.

He thought it was me. And he loved it… I can tell.

Biting my lip, I watch with wide, needy eyes as Colson pushes Tauren onto his back and straddles his hips.

But then the phone is snatched away. A needy whimper escapes me. “Wait…”

Colson growls and whips his phone across the room. “Why are you so obsessed with him?!”

I flinch in mild fear as he glares at me with anger simmering in his eyes. “I’m not—”

“Yes, you are! You guys have your own language, your own fucking thing together… And now here you are, swooning over the fact that he fucked me, thinking it was you!” He roars out an aggrieved noise and yanks his hair in his fists. “You were supposed to be *mad*.”

“What are you talking about?” I’m trembling, overwhelmed by the emotions bubbling up inside me. “How is this any different from what you do?? With Annabelle or Paris… You’re mad because I hung out with Carey, and because I’m close to Tauren?? Well, guess what? It’s all just a means to a fucking end, Colson! Because nothing and no one will *ever*—”

My brother’s soft, familiar lips cut my words right off.

In a blink, he’s pressing himself into me, grasping my jaw in his hand and kissing me dizzy. My head is instantly in the clouds. It reminds me of how infrequent this is… The times when he lets go, gives up and comes back to me. Every single time, it’s like a wave of memories, a rushing slideshow of sensation, in which we grow up together. We grow into each other.

Colson is practically seething into my mouth, purring and breathing in between sucking and biting at my lips, whipping my brain up so bad I can barely remember what we were just talking about… Or fighting about.

Pushing me onto my back, he crawls on top of me, and we squirm together. It’s always like this… Our kisses, heavy suction and panting and growling. It just feels so fucking *necessary*, heightened in how tangibly wrong it is.

It’s always been like this between us. Since the first time, and every other instance, it’s a shot of dopamine sent to bulldoze our nervous systems. Unhealthy? Hell yes.

Amazing nonetheless? *Of course.*

“I don’t care if you want him and he wants you,” Colson growls into my mouth, fingers shakily sliding up into my hair. “What about me, Cyrus? What… about… *me*??”

“I… I don’t… know…” I mumble the words in between panting and arching to rub my aching cock on my brother’s. I’m high, and I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what I could say to placate him.

He let Tauren fuck him tonight, pretending to be me… And Tauren apparently loved it.

It’ll take me more than a few minutes to process this information.

Finally, Colson whips his mouth off mine and rubs his eyes hard. “Ugh… fuck!” He leaps off me. “Fuck this, Cyrus. You’re supposed to be devastated that I fucked your precious Tauren. Not excited about it.”

Sitting up slowly, I gape at him, unable to help the desperation on my face. “Okay…”

“Okay?” His jaw ticks. “All you have to say is… *okay*?”

I also can’t help the little shrug my shoulders do. “What do you want me to say, Col?”

That I love you when I shouldn’t? That I love him *when I shouldn’t?*

That loving two of you not only at the same time but together never seemed tangible until right fucking now??

He stares at me for a moment in silence, during which the weight of everything seems to pulse the air, sucking all the oxygen out of the room.

“Nothing,” he eventually breathes ragged. “Don’t worry about it.”

And then he leaves. He storms out of my bedroom, slamming the door so hard I flinch on his way out.

Touching my fingertips to my lips, I can’t stop my brain from wandering in between the now three very different sets of lips I’ve had on mine tonight. And the two of them I want…

Together, above all else.

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TAUREN



N*ot anymore.*

I used to sincerely think I was a good person. I've never committed any crimes. I pay my taxes, give to charity, help elderly people cross the street and volunteer at soup kitchens every Thanksgiving.

I tip more than twenty-five percent *every* time, no matter what happens.

I've always been a *good guy*.

Until tonight.

Not. Anymore.

I can no longer say I'm a good person. Because tonight I slept with my underage stepson. I cheated on my wife with a minor…

And I fucking *loved it.*

I'm my fucking father.

Maybe that's the worst part. I can't even try to pretend I wasn't into it. It was the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me. A zillion times better than that time in college.

And so now, not only can I not call myself a good guy, I can't call myself *straight* either.

I'm not struggling with that part as much as the whole cheating on my wife with her son thing. Honestly, it was inevitable—the gay stuff. The amount of times I've fantasized about being with a guy… The amount of times I've jerked off remembering the night in college were staggering, and I was just waiting around for the other shoe to drop.

I just never expected it to be kicked off with my own stepson… Who's half my age.

Holding my breath, I submerge myself in the cool water of our infinity pool. It's heated, but still… It's sort of chilly tonight. The lights illuminate rippling blue around me while I let myself sink, deeper and deeper, keeping myself under until my lungs burn with the need for air.

I'm not different. I'm not the *savior*… the hero my aunt told me I was.

I'm exactly the same as the man who shares half my DNA. The man I always thought there was no way I could become…

Finally, I push myself up out of the water, gasping for oxygen and sucking it into my lungs.

I burrow my face in my hands. *What is wrong with me??*

My wife leaves for a few hours and I fuck her son? That's some real psycho shit.

If it was just about trying it with a guy again, I could have easily found someone else. But I didn't. That has to mean something.

I don't believe in coincidences. Everything happens for a reason. The building of my secret desires, Carla leaving this weekend… They have to be connected.

Cyrus's crush versus my… *needs*.

My head springs up at the sound of footsteps, clunking outside. At first glance, I see Cyrus, and my heart leaps into my throat like the floor was just pulled out from under me.

But then I take a closer look. "Colson?"

He stops walking and stares at me. I can tell in the intensity of his glare, the scowl on his lips and burning frustration in his green eyes that it's Colson. But what is he doing out here so late?

He continues to stand stock still for a moment, just glaring at me. And I'm growing nervous. The way he's looking at me is… unnerving. It's like he knows something.

Cyrus wouldn't tell him what we did… Would he?

Finally, he plops down onto one of the poolside chairs, slouching over. He looks tired, which makes sense. It's late. Momentarily, I wonder if I should talk to him, like I normally would. Ask if he's okay, if he needs anything.

But I'm not feeling entirely *fatherly* right now, what with me being a total fraud and all.

Colson pulls a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, sticking one between his teeth and lighting it, all the while with his eyes holding mine. He

certainly looks more irate than usual. There's something severe in the way he's just watching me closely while sucking a drag from his cigarette, holding it, then puffing it out, the stream of smoke swirling up into the cool air of the night.

"Is everything… alright?" I ask, trying to pry an answer as to why he's looking at me the way he is.

But he just keeps staring. Smoking in silence and hawk-eyeing me.

Eventually, I give up and float onto my back in the pool. I'm too tired for this. It's been such a long day. *I don't have the energy for games.*

The stars twinkle down at me while I remember the internet research I stumbled upon in high school…

Manhattan Producer Scandalizes The Broadway Community…

"Why did you marry her?" The voice pulls me back to earth and I tilt my head. "My mother… Why did you even marry her?"

Letting my legs fall, I stand up in the pool and face him, swiping a wet hand over my face. I'm not sure why he's asking me this now, but it's goddamn *excellent* timing.

Considering my words for a few breaths, I finally choose to utter, "It seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

No one speaks another word after that.

Colson finishes his cigarette and stomps it out before stalking broodingly back inside.

And I stay outside, watching the stars until they're no longer visible. When the sky becomes hazy with dawn, I drag myself up to bed and pass out.



I HAD A DREAM LAST NIGHT. Or this morning, whatever.

And in my dream, I was running.

In a faraway land I didn't recognize, a place I'm sure I've seen somewhere before, but in the moment, it felt strange and exotic.

But I couldn't be concerned with any of that as my heart pounded in my chest, because I was scared. *Nervous…*

During the dream, I couldn't tell if I was running away from something, or desperately running *to* something else. But it was important, I know that.

I knew it, in the dream too. I could *feel* the saturation of significance in whatever I was doing. The heaviness of time and space… it sat behind my ribs like a stone tomb around my heart.

My body was alive in that moment. Even within my fear, I felt stronger and more conscious than I have in my thirty-six years of life. In a *dream*.

I woke up sweating and writhing into my bed. The giant bed where I usually sleep next to a comatose Carla. I flung upright and looked around, breathing heavily. And it all felt so *wrong*.

Whatever I was doing in that dream was right, even if it didn't seem like it on the outside.

Chasing my truth… Running toward my true self.

I've just stepped out of the shower, and I'm dressing in weekend clothes. I'd considered going for a surf, but it's already basically noon and I should try to get some work done.

I should… go find Cyrus.

At mention of him in my head, all my muscles tense and I get the strangest, most conflicting emotions. Elated excitement and mortal dread, together as one. Mixed up like ingredients in a neurological bouillabaisse, I can barely comprehend that I'm feeling these things together, let alone that I'm feeling them for my *stepson,* who's barely eighteen.

A flash from last night comes to mind… Colson sitting outside by the pool, smoking and asking me why I married Carla. It was odd. He never usually seeks me out for anything.

Running my fingers through my damp hair, I look myself over in the bathroom mirror. I don't look different. But I feel it. I feel the change, the one that happened somewhere inside me, deep down. That place I never let myself get to, it was explored last night. I took spotlights and a microscope to it, like I was sliced open and the depths of Tauren Vance were pulled out, exposed.

None of this is new, for me, or apparently for Cyrus. I recognize now that he's had some sort of crush on me for a while… He said it last night.

I've wanted this since the first time I saw you.

My heart does this crazy little bump thing while my balls buzz, the memories so vivid. Of last night, yes, but also from the night before. The head in my office…

What am I even doing?

This is fucking insane.

But the insanity of it all doesn't stop me from wanting it. It doesn't stop me from making my way downstairs, quietly driven, in hopes that maybe Cyrus is down there. I just have this intense need to see him burning in my limbs. To watch his little mannerisms, the way his dark lashes flutter when he's nervous, and he bites his lip. The pink that rushes to his pale complexion.

I'm only going to admit this now, in the comfort of my own mind… But nothing has *ever* made me feel the way it felt to kiss him last night. It's a terrifying thought.

But the terror is… *exciting*. I'm awake, for the first time ever. He makes me feel alive…

Like running in a strange land.

The quiet house feels even quieter than usual as I make my way to the kitchen. I find it empty, a stab of disappointment hitting me as I go to the fridge for some juice. Drinking in silence, my mind filters through everything that's happened so far. I wonder what the hell I'm going to do when Carla comes back…

I'm wondering an awful lot lately.

"H-hey…" A familiar, timid voice pulls my focus back to the entrance of the kitchen, where Cyrus is shifting in place.

I'm instantly five degrees warmer and it's fucking ludicrous. "Hey."

We stare at each other for what feels like an hour, though it's really no more than ten seconds. I sip from my juice again. He blinks over wide green eyes. I place the bottle down. He blinks again.

"Cyrus…" I finally force myself to speak and move, stepping closer to him. "I don't know what's going on, but I just…"

My voice cuts out when I reach him. Mere inches separate our bodies, both chests jumping up and down as if we've just run miles, pupils blown out. His smell surrounds me… *Jesus*, it's unreal.

I'm not sure if I'm only just noticing how good he smells, or if maybe I'd previously chosen to ignore it. But now it's awakening parts of me I never knew existed.

Or rather, parts I've shoved down; boxed up and stored away. *Until now.*

"I can't stop thinking about you," I whisper. My hand lifts, as if it wants to touch him, but it's afraid of the repercussions.

Cyrus lets out a soft noise, his brow furrowing like something is hurting him. I hope it's not me.

"I'm… sorry…" I lean in. Our cheeks brush. We shudder in unison.

But the sound of a door opening and closing snaps us out of it.

We both jump, me leaping back to put some space between us while Cyrus molds himself to the doorframe behind him, gripping it like it's holding him up.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Vance!" one of our housekeepers, Maria, chirps, smiling politely as she passes by us, continuing on with her work—whatever she's doing at the moment.

I'm too busy panicking that she'll somehow sense the tension between us. Clearing my throat, I peek at Cy. "Um, Cyrus… I need your help with something. In my office. Can I borrow you for a sex—sec! For a *sec*?"

Jesus H. Christ…

My face is on fire, but it can't possibly be as red as Cyrus's right now. He simply nods repeatedly while I walk past him out of the kitchen, in the direction of my office. Peering back at Maria, she's paying us exactly zero attention.

Breathing unsteadily, I stagger into my office, Cyrus following behind me. The moment the door closes behind him, I rush to grab his face. Like I can't stop myself; I can't even help it at all. I just… *need*.

"I need your lips," I growl as my mouth descends over his, quickly enough that he gasps, back connecting with the door.

He tastes just as fantastic as he did last night. Sweet and young and nervous. And since fucking when is that so hot? I have no clue, but right now, I don't think an atomic bomb could pry my lips away from his.

My hands are all over him, in his hair, on his sharp jaw, his soft throat and the pulse within it, while his tremble on my chest, gripping my shirt in two balled fists. I take his plump lips between mine and suck, and bite, pushing them apart to give him my tongue while he melts into me, grinding himself against my body.

It's an inferno between us. So goddamn hot I'm burning, but it feels incredible. The *fire* of us.

"So so wrong," I purr into his mouth while he whines into mine. "But so fucking good."

Spinning him off the door, I push him farther into my office. We kiss our way to the nearest piece of furniture, which happens to be my pool

table. I shove Cyrus into it, and he stumbles, his ass leaning up on the edge. Our kiss never breaks.

“What am I supposed to do with you?” I mumble, licking and sucking myself into a trance.

“E-everything,” he stutters on a sigh, curious fingers tracing the curves of muscle beneath my shirt. “Do everything. *Anything*.”

A soft groan erupts from my throat while my balls thrum at the idea of doing things with him, similar to what we did last night. Or the night before, right over there at my desk.

I want his mouth on me again. I want to suck him while he sucks me.

I want to fucking unleash. Get him on his knees and...

“Jesus… you’re killing me,” I rasp to him, and kind of to my own thoughts, which are downright perverse. “I want inside you again, baby. *Please…*”

Cyrus shivers beneath me while I sort of drape myself over him on the pool table. I’m ready to devour him whole, but he seems to be hesitating suddenly.

His lips pry away from mine, and he shivers. “Um, Tauren, I… there’s something I think you should… know.”

“What is it, gorgeous?” My fingers brush through the silky strands of his jet-black hair while he fumbles about for words. It’s fucking adorable.

Cyrus leans up into my neck and nestles his face there, maybe to sniff me, maybe to hide himself because he’s shy and nervous. It’s beyond interesting to me how unashamed he was last night when we fucked. Because the Cyrus I know has always been timid like this. He’s anxious, in all things. Like a baby bird. I just want to hold him in my hands and nurture him until he’s ready to fly.

“Talk to me, baby,” I whisper, fingertips dancing on his nape. He quavers, and *God*, my dick is so fucking hard I can barely think.

Cyrus pulls his face back and gazes up at me. There’s something in his eyes I can’t put my finger on… A difference.

My brow furrows. My lips part.

And then a soft click startles me.

Turning over my shoulder, my eyes widen at the sight of Colson standing, leaning up against my office door.

“What’s happening in here?” His voice is quietly threatening, eyes casting an intense glare in our direction.

Letting go of Cyrus, I move back, straightening up while Cyrus remains seated on the edge of the pool table, likely unable to move in this state of awkwardness.

"What are you doing in here?" I blink at him. "The door was closed…"

The corner of his mouth quirks. "That's all you've got? You're in here molesting my brother and you're mad I opened a door that was *closed*?" His eyebrow cocks assuredly.

My pulse is pounding like crazy in my ears. This is terrible. If Colson tells Carla what he saw just now, my life is over.

"Colson…" Cyrus mumbles, his tone almost admonishing.

Glancing between the two of them, I witness one of their telepathic twin conversations. Right now, it's not so much compelling me as it is stressing me out.

"No one's *molesting* anyone," I interject, summoning the confidence I'll need to get out of this. "We were having a private conversation."

Colson chuckles. "I've never seen conversing look like that." He steps into the room, waltzing over casually. With only a few feet separating us, his gaze narrows right at me. "I knew it."

"Knew what?" I squint back at him.

"I knew there was something about you, *Tauren Vance*." He folds his arms over his chest. "No one is that perfect… That good."

"Colson, come on," Cyrus huffs. "Just tell him—"

"Shh!" Colson cuts off Cy's words by throwing his hand up fast. I'm very confused. "All that can wait. Right now, I want to know exactly what would have happened if I hadn't walked in."

"Colson, you're right," I tell him, taking on a new approach to appease him. "I'm not perfect. Far from it. And obviously, you're… upset."

"I'm not upset," he growls, a wicked snarl that sends a chill up my spine. Then he softens and says, "I'm intrigued. I have to admit, I've always found the *older guy* thing sort of hot."

My brows knit. "You have?"

"Oh, wait. Sorry, no. That's my brother." Colson smirks at Cyrus, who's face has never been pinker. He steps up to the pool table, right up to where Cyrus is seated, and presses in closer. "You like things you shouldn't… Don't you, good twin?"

My eyes are bugging as I watch this interaction, thoroughly surprised at what I'm witnessing. Colson is standing with Cyrus's thigh in between his

legs, hovering over his brother so that Cyrus has to lean back. I swallow hard, unable to stop my eyes from falling down their identical bodies. My dick twitches at the sheer closeness of their crotches.

"Col, we don't need to do this," Cyrus breathes as Colson's mouth inches over his quivering lips. I squeeze my hand into a fist to control the arousal bounding through me. "I don't want to play this game right now."

"Yes, you do," Colson whispers, running a hand up his brother's chest. "You always do."

I blink hard, wondering if I'm dreaming.

"I think we should show step-daddy how we *bad*." Colson's tongue extends, swiping Cyrus's lower lip. He's practically crumbling.

Fuck, I think I am, too.

It's insane, what I'm watching right now. Two identical twins, *kissing*.

Colson's mouth advances on Cyrus's, sucking and tugging with his teeth. The both of them seem instantly hypnotized by the sheer act of doing what they're doing. The raspy mewls and rumbling purrs that escape them are enough to burst my erection from within my pants. The sight of their pink tongues pressing together, pouty lips slowly succumbing to the sensations. Their lean, taut muscled bodies writhing together on my pool table…

My fingers move subtly down to my dick, to adjust it. It throbs in my hand and my whole damn body shakes.

"What are you two… doing?" I mumble stupidly, feeling like I should say something, because… *how did we get here??*

Colson pulls his mischievous mouth off his brother's and twists his face to glance up at me. "What do you want us to do?"

My dick jerks again. "I don't… I'm not… sure."

"Yes, you are," Colson hums, his hand drifting between him and Cy's zipped bodies. My eyes follow the hand as it travels, landing on the obvious outline of Cy's erection. Cyrus lets out a quiet sound, his head dropping back. "You want to give in to the bad stuff you keep hidden… Don't you, *Tauren Vance*? You want the stuff you shouldn't, too. Just like us."

My head starts bobbing on its own, nodding along with what he's saying. Because yes… that *is* what I want. I want it more than all the blazing consequences of my actions.

"Good." He grins devilishly, cupping Cyrus over his pants. "So tell us what we should do to help free that villain of yours. And we'll do it."

My throat is bone-dry as I swallow, my mind alive with possibilities. Here I was delighting in the idea of just *one* sexy young guy…

Two is better than one.

Something clicks into place. For the first time in over a decade, my mind and body synch together in agreement. The chains fall away as I stand taller, then cock my head.

"Take off each other's clothes." I speak firmly. "Nice and slow."

They start right away while I walk over to my office door, locking it. Cyrus removes Colson's shirt with visibly shaky fingers. Then Colson does the same to his brother, much less obviously nervous. Their dynamic is interesting. For as timid as Cyrus is, it's clear how desperately he wants it. And Colson remains in charge, eager to play, because it's all a game to him.

It has me wondering how often they do this as I saunter back over to the bar, pouring myself a scotch while I watch. Both of their pants come down, and the soft touches they share while undressing tell me it might be something that doesn't happen all that often. Just enough for them to know how good it feels.

Brothers. They're *brothers*… and they fool around. *Why does that make my dick so hard it hurts??*

I won't lie… A lot of the porn I watch involves brothers, whether it's real or for the sake of the story. Either way, it turns me all the way on. But I've never searched for twins before because, well, it always felt a bit too real.

Like what's happening now. This is as real as real gets. *And yet I still feel like I'm in a fever dream.*

Sipping my scotch, the burn serves as a nice distraction from how hard my pulse is thumping in my balls. I need to show some restraint, otherwise I'll end up coming in my goddamn pants. Colson slides Cyrus's boxers down his legs and tosses them, his eyes immediately set on the length of his brother. Then Cyrus pushes Colson's boxers down, and Col kicks them off.

I toss back the rest of my glass, sucking my lower lip into my mouth. *Holy fuck… Their dicks are identical, too.*

Colson peeks at me before brushing his hard cock against his brother's, causing Cyrus to whimper. "Now what?"

My mind is reeling with so much lustful madness, it's hard to focus. I can't tell if I barely recognize myself in this moment, or if I finally do.

“Get on the table. Both of you,” I demand, stepping up to the edge while they both climb onto the green felt. Fingers brushing each other’s flushed skin, their wide eyes gaze up at me, awaiting my instruction. I lick my lip slowly. “Suck… at the same time.”

Cyrus lets out a small noise, and Colson growls. I’m about to burst already, but I hold back. I have to. I want this to be the best release of my life, because who knows if anything like this will ever happen again.

The both of them lie on their sides, positioning with their dicks at mouth-level. Colson reaches down to grab Cyrus’s hair, yanking him closer as Cyrus parts his lips and sucks on the head of Colson’s dick. Col hums, and so do I, rumbling from deep within my chest.

Colson’s eyes stay on mine while he fists Cyrus’s cock, bringing it up to his parted lips. He laps up some precum from the crown and Cy flinches.

“He’s delicious… Isn’t he?” Colson whispers, directly to me, our eyes locked. There’s something in the way he’s watching me right now… Something that feels familiar. But I can’t put my finger on it.

Colson slips the head into his mouth, sucking while Cyrus does the same, and I can’t even believe my eyeballs right now. Twin *guys* sixty-nineing on my pool table. *Whose life is this??*

“Go slow,” I grunt at them, wide eyes taking in the sight. “And don’t come. Get each other right up to the edge and then stop.”

“Yes, Sir,” Colson rasps, and I swear I see him shiver. It’s such a Cyrus move, it mesmerizes me for a moment.

Moving around the edge of the table, I watch them closely, licking each other slowly, sucking playfully, savoring but never giving it too much. I can practically feel the build, leisurely coming up at an almost frustrating pace. The burn in my loins is more intense than anything I’ve felt before.

Needing to do something, I reach out, brushing my fingers along their milky flesh. Cyrus whimpers when I touch his back, eager fingertips trailing down to his ass. My eyes linger on all the curves of lean muscle, their nipples hardened into pebbles from the nip of the air conditioning and the fierce arousal swallowing us all up.

“That’s good, baby,” I tell him… Cyrus, I think, though it feels like I’m talking to both of them. “Suck hard, and slow. Make him want to burst in your sweet mouth.”

Their long-limbed bodies writhe into each other, flushed all over, building a sheen of sweat while their identical mouths make identical

moves. It’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen. Cyrus’s pink tongue, licking and lapping all over Colson’s cock, Colson’s soft lips wrapping around the thick stem of Cyrus’s shaft.

“Fuck yes.” My eyelids droop for a moment.

I need more. I’m dying here.

Tugging my t-shirt over my head, I toss it onto the pool table. Cy’s hooded gaze rushes all over my torso, and when I glance at Colson, he’s giving me a similar look. So I unbutton my pants. Then unzip.

Leaning over the table a bit, my fingers comb through Colson’s hair, pushing his head down farther on his brother’s dick. He groans over the obstruction and Cyrus gasps.

“I’m… *fuck*, I’m c-close,” Cyrus whines. So I yank Colson’s head off Cyrus’s dick by his hair.

The look on Colson’s face is hypnotizing. The flushed, starry-eyed lust… It looks so much like Cyrus from last night, it’s throwing me for a loop. He peeks up at me and bites his lip. My thumb brushes, plucking it from between his teeth.

Then I push my pants down, with my boxers, enough to pull out my erection, stiff as a metal pole. Colson’s eyes never leave mine, his chest moving up and down while he touches his tongue to his teeth. I swallow hard, fisting my cock and moving it up to his lips.

“Like a lollipop,” I whisper.

Our eyes are connected, holding on while he laps at the head of my cock, slowly. I can’t help my lashes fluttering, a breath hissing between my teeth. His tongue is so warm as he licks lines up and down my shaft, tracing the veins while breathing warmth on my solid flesh.

This feels entirely like an alternate universe. The other night, his brother had my dick in his throat in this very room, and now the bad twin is giving it plush kisses and my brain is about to explode.

Positioning myself on the pool table beside them, straddling Cyrus’s a bit, I take my cock in my hand and then grab his. Cyrus whimpers while sucking Colson’s dick, sleepy eyes watching my every move while I push both of our erections, *together*, up to Colson’s mouth. Colson’s pupils are blown out as he gazes at both cocks.

“Open wide,” I command, breathlessly. And he does.

It’s a tight fit, but I’m able to shove at least the tips of both Cyrus’s and my dicks into Colson’s mouth together, with the scrape of some teeth, sure.

He grunts around our flesh, sucking as best he can, his eyes rolling back in his head. Cyrus is still worshipping his brother's cock with his sweet mouth, while Colson attempts to adjust to two thick dicks in his mouth at once.

"Jesus," I rumble, high from the feel of Cyrus's dick beside mine in my hand, and the sight of them both overflowing from Colson's mouth.

Colson is squirming, I think because he can't breathe, and maybe because he's about to come. The latter is definitely correct, because he taps frantically on Cyrus's thigh, then reaches down and grabs his brother's head to stop him. Cyrus yanks his eager mouth off Colson's dick, breathing heavily and craning his neck to watch his brother suck both of us simultaneously.

My fingers are desperate, touching every surface of Cyrus I can reach, his hips, his thighs, his abs, while also combing through Colson's dark strands, encouraging him as his eyes water and spit flows from the corners of his mouth.

"Mmm… I…" Cyrus gasps, writhing about himself. "I want to come. *Please*."

"Uh-uh." I shake my head, tugging both of our dicks out of Colson's mouth. "Not yet."

"Fuck." Colson's voice is hoarse as he sweeps in a long breath.

Running my hand down to his dick, I fist it gently. "Do your balls hurt?" I cup his nuts, and he whimpers, nodding. I do the same to Cyrus. "How about yours?"

"Yes," he whines, hips moving against my hand, chasing friction and a desperate need for an orgasm he won't be getting. Not yet, anyway.

"Good." I tap on Cyrus's leg while climbing off him. "Get on top of your brother."

He does as I say, and I push on his lower back, to make sure their balls are resting together, dicks close enough to stroke on one another.

Sitting at the edge of the pool table by their sides, I lean in and whisper in Cyrus's ear. "Now, rock your hips, baby. Rub yourself on him."

Cyrus moans, leaning into me, though he does exactly as I say, rocking his hips slowly, rubbing his balls on Colson's. He adjusts to make sure their hard, straining cocks are together, pushing and pulling for that delicious friction that will get them just close enough without allowing them to climax.

It’s painfully arousing, being *almost* there. I can feel it myself, and I’m not even doing it.

“Mmm… that looks so sexy, precious,” I mumble into Cyrus’s ear, licking the lobe before sucking it between my lips. “Hump his brains out.”

Cyrus moves faster, harder, chasing the good feelings as he shivers, muscles constricting, breathing out forceful gasps and grunts. Colson reaches up to hold his brother’s hips, digging his fingers in to display how good and goddamn frustrating it feels.

Watching the two of them move together is unlike anything I could have dreamt up. Right now, the only difference in their appearance are the occasional scatters of ink on Colson’s torso and arms. That’s it. Otherwise, they look exactly the same.

Same blushed cheeks, same hooded green eyes and dark fanning lashes, same black hair all tousled about.

My cock is so hard, it’s flinching on its own. I want *more*. I want to watch them fuck each other while I fuck either of them. I want to rub my cock all over their faces while I come. I want to smash myself in between them and do *literally everything*. It’s such a fantastically overwhelming need, I could pass out.

Moving in closer, I grasp Cy’s jaw and push his mouth down. “Suck me, baby. Please.”

He does, wasting no time latching onto the head of my dick. My eyes close for just a moment, but I force them open to watch him sucking gingerly on my dick, like he’s savoring the experience. It feels somehow different from the last time he gave me head. But it’s probably just this moment we’ve found ourselves in.

“Fuck, Cy,” Colson growls, driving his hips upward, grinding himself into Cyrus while shaking visibly. “You feel so good.”

“No coming,” I hiss, unable to stop myself from pushing deep into Cyrus’s throat until he gags.

“Then this needs to stop,” Colson rasps. “I’m gonna blow in like two seconds.”

A breathless chuckle escapes me as I pull out of Cy’s mouth, holding his shoulders. “Stop moving, baby.”

He whines in protest. “I don’t want to.” He sounds exhausted, and it’s somehow insanely arousing. “I want to come. *Please*… please please. I *need* to come.”

“Not just yet.” My fingers thread in his hair as I lean down to kiss him softly. The intense desire to take care of him is prominent. My eyes fall to Colson, who’s watching us with glistening eyes. *Both of them… I want to give them both euphoria… Together.* Pulling back from Cyrus, my eyes linger on Colson. “Kiss your brother.”

Cyrus lies down with Colson, and they sink into making out while I go pour myself another drink. Sipping my scotch slowly, I’m truly in my element. *This* right here is the part of myself I’ve always held down, just beneath the surface.

It was never only about the desire to try it with a man again…

This dominance, it comes naturally to me. I never wanted it, though. I’ve spent my entire life trying to concede to others, to make myself pliable. To keep these urges for control under strict wraps.

But now that I know how perfect it feels, now that I’ve given in to the wickedness that lives inside me, I don’t think it was ever a choice. Because right here, right now, with two deliciously sexy young men, naked and fooling around on my pool table while I sip expensive scotch, I feel settled.

I feel like *me*… No matter how *bad* it is.

I could get used to this.

The reality is that it’s far more complicated, but I refuse to lose this buzz right now. So I focus on my twin stepsons, kissing and touching, writhing their engorged dicks together in desperate need of release.

Colson glances up at me where I’m standing with my glass and gives me a sleepy smirk. “Daddy likes to watch?”

My stomach tightens, but I control it, tongue sliding over my lower lip. “Suck on each other’s fingers.” They both stop kissing, their rough pants ringing through the air as they gaze up at me. “Make them wet.”

They do as I say with no hesitations, which I’ve gotta say, makes me feel like a god. Colson takes Cyrus’s hand in his, stuffing two of his fingers into his mouth. Then Cyrus does the same, both of them sucking with their burning green eyes locked the whole time. Dirty and erotic as hell.

Finishing my glass, I step back up to the edge of the pool table. “I want to see you fingering each other’s tight little holes. And if you do a good enough job, I’ll let you come.”

“Fuck me,” Cyrus whimpers on Colson’s fingers.

Colson pulls his mouth free. “I could do that too, ya know.” He peeks at me. “I’ve done it before.”

Releasing a growl, I lean in until my lips are practically hovering over his. I can't miss the nervous glint in his eyes, which thrills me down to my bones. "You'll fuck him when I say you can fuck him. For now, you'll be using your fingers."

Colson swallows visibly. Then his eyes fall to my mouth.

I can't help it. Mine do the same.

Should I kiss him?

A force feels like it's drawing us together, confusing me deep. I've only ever kissed Cyrus. And sure, we're all fooling around in here, but this feels somehow… different.

Colson, the angry one, the misfit, the evil version of his sweet twin brother… His green eyes shine with just as much need in my direction, if not more.

Snapping myself out of it, I back up and give him a look that says, *get going.*

He blinks, then slides his gaze back to his brother. Cyrus looks dazed as all hell, probably from a desperate need to come, which I certainly understand. Lying together on the pool table, they maneuver into an almost scissoring position so that both hands can reach between each other's legs at the same time. Gripping the edge with white knuckles, I watch as Colson kisses Cyrus's neck, spitting on his fingers some more before bringing them between his cheeks. I can't really see what's happening well, but I can tell the moment a finger breaches Cy's ass because he breathes out a gasp, which turns quickly into a needy purr.

"You like it, don't you, good twin?" Colson whispers, moving his hand in slow strokes between Cy's legs. Cyrus's cock bobs and leaks on his abs, his eyes rolling back in his head.

"God, that looks good," I murmur. "Your turn, Cy. Give Colson your fingers, baby."

Cyrus's eyes open, and he gives Colson a look. Colson's cheeks flush uncharacteristically while he licks his lip.

"I guess I can try it," Colson rumbles, his eyes flitting to me briefly.

"You've never taken it before?" I ask him, unable to stop my fingers from walking up his arm. He glances at Cyrus, and they share another strange look before he shakes his head. "It feels good, I promise."

"It feels… so fucking good," Cyrus groans, his hips chasing the feel of Colson's fingers inside him.

Colson nods, and Cyrus gives him his fingers to suck again. When he pulls them free, a line of saliva goes with them. And then Cyrus moves his hand down to his brother's parted legs. I watch as closely as I can get while Cy's fingers swirl over Colson's rim. Then one slips inside.

"*F-fuck*," Colson whimpers, and bites his lip.

"This is so hot," Cyrus breathes, stroking one finger in and out. "I'm not gonna last."

"You've waited long enough," I tell them, eyes stuck below their waists at the dual, identical hands, pumping in and out of their asses. "Make each other come."

"Thank God," Cyrus whimpers.

"Cy, give me more," Colson purrs. "I want more."

Cyrus thrusts a second finger into Colson's ass, and I can almost see the stars he's seeing.

"I'm gonna come," Colson drapes himself over his brother, his hand flicking, fingers curling to find Cyrus's prostate. "Come with me, baby."

"Come together," I command, climbing onto the table to get closer.

"I'm gonna… *fuck*…" Cyrus's voice snaps.

They're wearing each other like clothing as they breathe and pant and purr, fingering each other's asses so deep and so *hard*. I'm witnessing them reach the top of the ledge, this time tumbling right over.

"God *fuck yesss*." Colson's lips quiver.

Cyrus's dick shoots first, though Colson's blows only seconds later. Watching in awe, my balls are throbbing, veins in my dick pumping like crazy as cum bursts from their identical cocks, pulsing all over their chests. It spurts up to their necks, decorating their flushed skin while they groan and grunt together.

What a spectacular sight. My dick is ready to do the same from barely anything touching it.

"Col… Jesus fucking Christ," Cyrus mewls as they rub their cum-covered skin together.

Cyrus kisses Colson. Colson mewls into Cyrus's mouth.

I need to…

"I need to come." I climb up onto the pool table, kneeling beside them.

They don't even ask what to do. They just do it.

My twin stepsons lean down to my dick together. Their warm, wet mouths suck at the head of my cock, tongues lapping and feathering until

I'm crumbling into a million pieces. Reaching down, I hold both of their heads to help them suck me. Colson sucks while Cyrus licks, then Cyrus plays with my crown while Colson moves down to my balls. It takes only a few minutes before I'm plummeting over the edge myself.

"Oh, God… oh *fuck*, I'm coming," I growl as my dick shoots off in their faces.

Colson catches cum on his lips and chin, then Cyrus takes some into his mouth. The two of them kiss my cum off each other's pouty lips while I gaze at them with a world of wonder in my eyes.

This is it. The *moment*.

I thought that night in college had been it. But the trajectory of my life still brought me down a regular path after that. The moment that has changed everything is this one, *right now*. I wandered up to a fork in the road, split in two. I chose a direction.

And I will never be the same.

Climbing off the pool table on shaky legs, I grab Cyrus first, who's practically falling down. I scoop him up into my arms and carry him over to my chaise lounge. Laying him down, I drape the throw blanket over his body, brushing sweat-soaked hair away from his temple.

He's so beautiful. *So sweet, precious.*

I press a kiss on his cheek, but it seems like he's already fast asleep. I understand it. I could collapse myself.

I turn back to the pool table, where Colson is getting dressed. Swallowing hard, I wander over to him, pulling up my own pants and zipping them. As I approach, he glances at me, and there's a look in his eyes, on his face, which is puzzling. Suddenly, I feel so confused around him… I don't know what to think.

I haven't looked at him the way I've looked at Cyrus. He's the pain in the ass, the one who won't give me the time of day. It's not like it is with me and Cy… Colson was never interested in me. In any way.

But now we've crossed the same line, and I can't tell if Cyrus is the link between us, or if there's something more.

My hand reaches out to Colson's face, like a reflex; an instinct. My fingers brush his jaw. And for a split second, he lets me. He leans into my touch, reminding me so much of the last few days with Cyrus, it nearly stops my heart.

But in a flash, his eyes grow cold. He pins me with an angry scowl, then slaps my hand away from his face.

"Colson…" I rumble softly, feeling monumentally stupid.

I just don't know what to say to him. After what's happened… I'm at a loss.

Will he tell Carla about this? About me and Cyrus? Does he think I'm a huge pervert?

Did he only engage in what just happened because of his brother?

I'm all fucked up.

"Leave me alone, Tauren," he grunts, turning away from me. "You have *your* Cyrus back."

And then he storms out of the room, leaving me with *my* Cyrus, wondering what the fuck that even means.

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COLSON



The sun dips into the ocean while I strum my guitar.

I'm sitting at the edge of our property which overlooks the stretch of beach below, Fender acoustic in my lap, fingers brushing the familiar chords to one of my favorite songs called *Ever So Sweet*. The colors of sunset splay out before me, lulling me just as much as the tune I'm humming, working as my favorite distraction to the chaos in my brain.

I don't like to admit it out loud, because acting like I don't care plays so much better into my misfit image, but I know I could be a really good musician. The stupid band I started with my friends is just for fun, but when I'm all alone and in my feelings, I like to come out here and play to the ocean.

I like to imagine that I'm the soundtrack to the sunset, the breeze and the birds. Nature makes its own music, sure, but I like to play along with it; give it some harmony.

I've spent a majority of the day outside. After the crazy shit that went down in Tauren's office, I made myself scarce, knowing it would only drive me crazy to watch him tend to Cyrus like an adorable baby kitten requiring constant affectionate cuddles. I wandered the beach and smoked a joint, then drove around for a while. I considered going back to Charlie's house for more partying, but decided against it. I definitely haven't been in the mood for more uncomfortable bullshit with Paris or Annabelle, or whichever other girl feels like clinging to me.

When I came back home, Tauren and Cyrus were having dinner. I'm not sure if it was awkward between them… I didn't stick around to find out.

But knowing the two of them, it probably wasn't. They probably slipped right back into their nerdy conversation while holding hands and making googly eyes at each other. Playing house while Mom is gone, using the opportunity to flaunt their forbidden relationship out in the openness of our empty house.

Instead of dealing with them, or going upstairs to smash shit, I grabbed my guitar and came outside to play, which I've been doing for over an hour now. It's keeping me calm enough, but the bleak state of my existence still lingers on the edge of my consciousness.

The fact that I'm a moron, mostly.

My fingers work on the strings while I internally scold myself. I can't believe I thought that stupid plan would get me anywhere. It was a dumb idea, and I feel dumb for how confident in myself I'd been at first.

Pretending to be Cyrus to seduce Tauren? I mean, really… What did I think it would accomplish?

Cyrus wasn't anywhere near as hurt as I expected him to be. Not that I necessarily *wanted* to hurt him… But I always do, whether I want to or not.

Really, I just wanted him to see that at the end of the day, Tauren is just a man. He's not a god, or a hero. He's flesh and blood and urges, just like everyone else. He's not anywhere near as *good* as he's always tried making himself seem. We got a firsthand look at that today in his office.

The dude has a devious side for sure. It gives me chills just thinking about it.

Swallowing hard, I shake my head while my hand slides. It doesn't matter what I thought I felt… It was a stupid game that went wrong, just like everything I do. I don't even want to tell Tauren the truth now. It's pointless.

The only thing my plan accomplished was proving what I already know. My brother is the golden child, the genius… He's the diamond. I'm just the lump of coal.

Sure, telling Tauren it was me he slept with when he wanted Cyrus would probably piss him the fuck off, which might bring me a small sliver of joy. But ultimately, it'll shove him closer to Cyrus. They'll side with each other over me and that'll be that.

No thanks.

We'll just keep the truth to ourselves for now. Last night will remain a strange incident I refuse to acknowledge as something beautiful that

satisfied me down to my core.

It wasn't even all that.

Rolling my eyes to myself, I sing the chorus of the song I've been playing on repeat for minutes on end, the lyrics I know by heart, etched on my skin. The sun is almost gone when a large figure appears at my left. I glance up at him for only a split second, choosing to ignore his presence. Or pretend to…

Unfortunately for me, it's impossible to truly ignore him. I seem to be hyper*aware* of him now, and I fucking hate it.

Clearly not picking up on my desire to be alone, Tauren takes a seat next to me on the stone wall. He's sitting too close, and it's bringing unwanted heat to my flesh that I'm trying desperately to disregard.

"That sounds nice." His voice rumbles at the side of my face and I force myself not to look at him. "What is it?"

I keep mute for a minute or so, but there's this strange itch inside me that wants to tell him what I'm playing. It's like I want to impress him, to *bend* to him, and it's bullshit.

I'm not playing Cyrus anymore. I don't have a crush on Tauren… and he's *not* my fucking father.

Still, I mutter, "It's a song by The Early November." My eyes slide in his direction. "You're too old to know them."

He delivers a chuckle that twists my gut and has me hating myself even more. "Jesus, you make it sound like I'm a hundred. I used to listen to punk and emo when I was your age too, ya know. I still like a lot of it. It's… nostalgic."

"Oh yea?" I scoff, but he just nods enthusiastically. "What songs are your favorites?"

"Well…" He turns to face me. "How about *Helena*? My Chemical Romance…"

My lips curl a bit, but I smother it. "Nice try. Everyone knows that song."

He laughs again. "Okay. What about *Poetic Tragedy*…?"

I go still, my fingers pausing over the strings as my surprised face tilts in his direction. "How the hell do you know that song?"

"I told you, I used to listen to that stuff." He shrugs. "I've seen The Used a few times. Once *with* My Chemical Romance, actually. I got to see Bert and Gerard perform their *Under Pressure* cover live. It was sick."

The way I'm gawking at him makes him laugh some more. My mouth is literally just hanging open, arm lying limp over my guitar. *This Mathlete is a fan of The Used?? Meaning he actually knows old school Bert McCracken?!*

"Wow… alright." I shake my head. "I guess you're not a total dweeb."

Suddenly, his lips are much closer to the side of my face, his warm breath tickling my ear as he whispers, "Someone needs to correct that rude behavior of yours, kid."

My face turns slowly in his direction, my heart pumping the same way it did when we were alone yesterday. My mind flicks through images of him commanding me, hurting me a little while giving me the praise reserved for when he thought I was Cyrus…

And earlier today, how he reigned this sort of bored dominance over the both of us… I can't lie, it was insanely hot. The way he's looking at me right now has all the hairs on the back of my neck standing up.

"Who could do that…?" I ask on a hesitant breath, placing my guitar off to the side.

Tauren's eyes fall to my mouth. And I'm so warm I think my clothes might melt off my body. I'm vibrating in the intensity of how he's looking at me, wondering why I seem to be craving his control deep within the stuff that makes me up. The need to submit to him feels like it's woven between the strands of my muscles; flowing with the blood in my veins.

Have I always wanted this?

I never wanted it with Cyrus. With my brother, I like to be in charge. I can't even imagine him dominating me. It doesn't seem right.

But Tauren… I don't know, he has this way about him now; something that's only just been revealed to the world, but now that it's here it feels like it always was. I literally never saw him as domin*ant* before, but now that I know his secret… I'm yearning for more.

Tauren's hand slowly lifts, his fingers dragging a line up my sternum, then my throat. It's such a simple movement, but I can barely breathe.

"Why have you been avoiding me, Colson?" He ignores my question and asks his own, voice dripping like silk. "I know you enjoyed yourself earlier…"

I swallow, his fingers grazing my Adam's apple as it bobs in my throat. "You don't need me… You have Cyrus." *The real Cyrus.*

“You’re not the same person,” he whispers with our eyes locked together. “And whatever is going on with me and him is separate from this.” He motions between us with his fingers.

“There is no *this*,” I mumble a stupid protest that obviously means jack shit since I’m inching closer and closer to him with every breath.

His mouth just looks so goddamn inviting… I’ve never wanted someone’s lips on me more.

“Wanna bet?” he hums, cupping my jaw gently in his strong hand.

So masculine… So large…

God, what is wrong with me?? I thought I was… straight. Now, I’m barely clinging to bisexual.

My lashes flutter as I fall deeper and deeper under his spell. And when he whispers, “Come,” I go.

I close the inches between our mouths, and I kiss him, trying to play it cool, though I’m needy with shaky fingers and hungry lips. Little moans of satisfaction leave me and flow into him while I kiss him greedily, pawing at his chest and shoulders as he holds me in place by my jaw to slow me down.

I can’t help it. I’m usually so much smoother than this, but he just crosses my wires. I don’t get it.

Just as I’m trying to climb onto his lap, he pulls away and stands up, leaving me desperate for so much *more*.

Panting, I gaze up at him and he cocks his head. “Would you like to kneel next to me, Colson?”

Gaping a sort of shell-shocked expression, I try to think of any response, but my mind is all fuzz. *He wants me to… kneel? For him?*

Clearly noting my confusion at his question, he adds, “I’m more like my true self right here and now than I’ve ever been before. And you boys are to thank for that. So I think…” He pauses and his throat dips in a crazy attractive swallow. “I think I’d like for you to kneel by my feet. Just to see how it feels…”

I’m stunned. Flabbergasted. Confused *as fuck.*

And yet… my body reacts. It just *does* what he’s asking, repositioning so that I’m on my knees, right by his feet, where he’s standing over me.

My breathing is out of control, my heart pounding so hard it feels like my brain is shaking. My sweaty palms are resting on my denim-clad thighs

while I shiver next to my stepdad's legs. I'm not sure if he wants me to look at him, but I can't stop myself.

Curiosity wins out and my face tilts upward, only to find him gazing down at me, a purely salacious glint to his blue eyes. The irises have turned to a midnight shade, likely from the fact that the sun is gone and it's getting darker outside. It really makes him look devious; commanding and hungry, two things I never thought I'd think about Tauren Vance before my ridiculous plan apparently yanked it out of him.

He reaches down and brushes his fingers tenderly through my hair. The feeling relaxes me so much, my eyes actually close and I let out a soft sigh.

This is fucked up *crazy*. Never in a million years would I expect myself to enjoy submitting to anyone, let alone my asshole stepdad I formerly hated. I've always lashed out at authority figures. It's kind of my thing. Anti-establishment, anarchy and all that.

And while deep down I can probably admit that I get butterflies at the thought of a *man* touching me—the types of needy tickles I've never gotten from any girl I've hooked up with—that's a sexuality quandary for me to squash at my leisure. It has nothing to do with the Dom/sub kink that seems to be developing right now.

My mouth is becoming dryer and dryer as I contemplate all this whacky stuff, my hair being gently stroked by my stepfather while my mind sifts through the things he could do that would settle me even more than simply being on my knees.

Like his hand around my throat last night…

"Colson." Tauren's voice pulls me out of what really felt like an actual trance, and I peer up at him once more. "You're hard."

My brow furrows in confusion until he nods downward. I drop my chin, and sure enough, I find the aggressive outline of my erection pushing against my jeans. Burning shame instantly climbs up my neck onto my face while I gulp down my insecurities.

"I'm… um…" I have no clue what I'm trying to say, but I sure as shit can't look him in the eye now that he knows kneeling at his feet gets me hard. It's as embarrassing as it is confusing. Default anger and defensiveness slip out of my mouth fast. "Whatever. Leave me alone."

Yanking my head away from his hand, I fumble on my knees like I'm about to stand. But Tauren grabs my face. He takes my chin between his fingers and jerks me, forcing me to look up at him.

I lick my quivering lips as my heart jumps wild gallops in my chest. He simply cocks his head and gazes at me, the look he's wearing somehow so easy to read. It's as if he's saying, *No more games. Drop the act.*

Swallowing hard, my muscles ease up, losing the fight instinct that's always ready to take over when I'm nervous. Tauren releases my chin, taking a step back. And now I'm panicking again. *He's leaving. He hates me. He changed his mind and decided he doesn't want to be next to me…*

He walks away and my heart hurts; it's *aching* brutally in my chest at the thought that I might've fucked this up, too. Killed this new thing before it even had a chance to sprout into something delightfully depraved.

But then he stops. "I'm going into the pool house. I want you to follow me." My despondent gaze lifts from the ground and I peek in his direction, blinking stupidly before I shift to stand. But he holds his hand up. "I want you to crawl."

My knees are already aching from the brick beneath them, but some real interesting excitement is fizzling inside me. My knee-jerk reaction is to say *fuck no*; to resist him humiliating me and telling me what to do. It's what I'm used to.

But again, there's a *new motivation* thrumming in my blood, something I might never have known about if I hadn't pretended to be Cyrus for the past few days.

Speaking of my brother, I mumble, "What about Cyrus?" Knowing he's inside while this is happening has me feeling a crapload of uncertainties.

"He's resting," Tauren answers. "Still tired from earlier."

I nod slowly, unsure of how to feel about that. This is all so fucking weird, I actually pinch my wrist subtly to see if I'm dreaming.

Nope… I'm awake.

Awake and alive and about to…

"Crawl, Colson," Tauren commands. And I do.

I begin crawling. Gradually, on my hands and knees, I move toward Tauren, who's watching me with his dark eyes alit in satisfaction. Seriously, right now, he looks like he's just as surprised that he's doing these things as I am, and that I'm actually following directions so effortlessly.

It is beyond bizarre. But *surprise surprise*, my dick is still rock hard.

When I'm only a few feet from him, Tauren turns and continues walking, entering our giant lavish pool house, which actually serves as a guest house on the rare occasion we have overnight company. It doesn't

happen much, but this cool loft-like house is here just in case, set up with a couch, a bed, and a working bathroom. It's pretty bougie, like most things my mom does are.

Tauren wanders inside and up the elevated step to where the bed is, then takes a seat on the edge. Just seeing him sitting on a bed, while I'm crawling toward him, is enough to bunch all my muscles up in nervous anticipation.

I officially have no clue what's going to happen in here, but I know I want it. If that makes me a weird gay little slut, well… I don't think I care. It's incredible how much more assured I am doing the things I never let myself think about. This must be how Cyrus feels when we're together.

I think I understand why he loves it so much.

But how is it possible for me to want both? To control Cyrus, yet give it up to Tauren?

I don't understand it at all, but as I crawl up the step and approach the bed, and Tauren pats the mattress like a giant hunk of masculine temptation, my mind shuts the fuck up. The overthinking, the obsessive thoughts, all the doubt and insecurity flick like a light switch. And I just focus on *him*.

"You look so good crawling to me," he drawls in a seductive tone that makes me think of creamy caramel.

Before I can even process it, I'm whispering, "Thank you."

The corner of his mouth twists as he leans down to make us eye-level. "I have an idea."

"Do you?" I mumble, unable to keep from watching his mouth, that little dip on his upper lip that I'm desperate to run my tongue over.

"I think I know what you need, Colson." He stands up and holds out his hand for me to take, which I do, and he helps me to my feet. "You and I may be able to help each other, just like Cyrus and I helped each other."

I flinch at that comment, wondering if he's referring to last night, with me acting like Cyrus, or if they fooled around today while I was out pouting alone.

I'm not sure if either scenario would make me happy.

Tauren keeps my hand engulfed in his, our bodies so close now that I'm standing, we're almost flush. "Just while your mom is gone. It'll be our secret."

His breath brushes my lips, and I tremble.

I said that to him the night I sucked his dick… Then he said it to me last night. Our secret.

He still has no idea it was me…

"Why would you want to help me?" The question just comes out.

Tauren gives me a look, his brow furrowing a bit. "I've always wanted to help you, Colson. You just never let me."

My stunned blinking returns as I gape at him. *He's wanted to help… me? Cyrus, sure, but me?*

I can barely process this revelation. All this time, I thought he overlooked me, just like everyone does. I thought he only wanted Cyrus, as a friend, a stepson… a bang-buddy, apparently. But as it turns out… he wants me, too.

My teeth seal over my lower lip and I don't even realize I'm doing it until Tauren lets out this rumbly growl from deep in his throat. He's looking at me like he wants to eat me alive. Me, *Colson*!

This is wild.

"Will you take off your clothes for me, bad twin?" There's amusement dancing in his eyes, lighting a damn inferno in my loins.

He wants me, too. The bad twin…

I'm so fucking high I could fly right now.

Nodding in agreement, I tug my shirt over my head, then unzip my pants with shaky fingers while Tauren spins on his heel and wanders away. He appears to be looking for something, though I'm not sure what. Still, I just step out of my shoes and socks, then yank my pants and boxers down as Tauren strolls up to the doors of the pool house, closing and locking them.

He draws the full-length privacy shades that cover up the glass on the doors and looks up at me. "Lie down on the bed, please."

My heart is bumping like deep bass as I slither onto the bed and lie down on my side so I can watch him. He's still just snooping around in search of something, but the way he moves is so graceful. He's all long limbs and bulky muscle, prowling around like a large jungle cat. I've always been impressed by his self-confidence, though I never would have let myself admit I was attracted to his qualities before.

And apparently, I'll have some serious stuff to deal with after this weekend. Here I've been comforting Cyrus through his sexuality crisis for

years, when in reality, I'm just as confused. Actually more, because he's always known he likes guys. I sincerely thought I was straight…

Okay, maybe not. But I tried to tell myself I was.

Yet watching Tauren move, and remembering the way his dick feels in various places on my body… *I think it's safe to say all three of us are moving to Gayville after this weekend.*

Tauren finally locates what he was looking for and speaking of dicks, mine has never been harder. He has picked up some filament rope he uses to tie up his surf boards, and is now stalking over to the bed with it.

Good Lord.… My brain goes pure static as he reaches the edge, holding up two lengths of rope for me to see.

"I think the best way for me to help you, Colson, is to clear your mind," he says, reaching down and taking my wrist in his hand. "I want you to stop thinking about all the bullshit that trips you up, and I definitely want you to stop feeling like no one cares about you. It's not true. Lift your leg."

I do as he asks, fully captivated by the way he's talking to me, calmly, not scolding. It feels like he's on my level. It feels like he *does* care, which isn't an impression I've ever gotten from him before. But maybe that was because I never gave him the chance. I was too focused on him being my mother's stupid husband, and how much he obviously loves Cyrus. It never even occurred to me that he could care for me, too.

Tauren ties my right wrist to my right ankle, tightly, but with enough slack between them that I'm not stretching too much. Still my leg is sort of up in the air, and it gives me an idea of why he might want me like this…

Some precum leaks onto my abs, and my cheeks heat in humiliation. Tauren swipes his thumb through it and brings it to his lips, sucking off my flavor.

"Jesus…" I pant, chest already heaving and we haven't even started yet.

He leans over me. "You taste good for someone so bad. Other leg, please."

Quaking, I lift my left leg, and he ties my left wrist to it. Then he stands back and observes me, naked and tied up in an extremely compromising position, nodding his approval. Going to the nightstand, he opens a drawer and pulls out a few things. I strain my neck to see what he's doing, finding him fiddling with a tub that looks like it might be Vaseline, a silk scarf, and something else I can't see from this angle.

Tauren comes back to me with the scarf. “You’re smart, and talented, and fully deserving of love, Colson. I’m sorry you haven’t gotten enough.”

My throat feels thick, and I swallow over and over to get it to go away. My face is tight with emotion, but thankfully, Tauren places the scarf over my eyes and ties it, cutting off my vision. A chill washes over me. I can’t see shit and I’m all trussed up like a pig about to be roasted at a luau. Tell me why my dick is still leaking all over my stomach.

I hear Tauren rustling around, but I don’t know what he’s doing. Until I feel the bed dip at my side, and my shivering turns violent.

“Relax for me, bad twin,” he breathes right by my ear, and I flinch. “There are no safe words for this just yet… But it will get pretty intense. If you want me to stop, all you have to say is *stop*, okay?” I nod fast, but just like last night, he isn’t satisfied. “Use your words, Colson.”

“Okay, yes,” I croak, licking my lips. “I um… I got it.”

Tauren makes a small noise like a huff of a chuckle, and I feel the flush rising all over my body. “I like you like this. You want to behave for me, don’t you?”

His hand brushes along the underside of my thigh and I whimper, “Yes. I d-do.”

His fingers keep sliding down my leg, dangerously close to where my ass is kind of… spread open. “You want to be good for me… even though you’re so *bad*. Right?”

I nod frantically, my limbs straining with need. I want his hand lower… *God, I want it.* “Yes.”

Tauren moves an inch or two, then places both of his hands on my legs, spreading them farther apart. “You look *very* good.” His warm breath dances on the skin of my chest. And then I feel his tongue swipe my left nipple. A whine leaves me, and he does it again. Just a quick lash of his tongue on my peaked flesh. “Your nipples are so *hard*… perfect for sucking.”

He sucks my nipple into his mouth, hard enough that I gasp. Then his lips trail down, pressing gentle kisses on my left pectoral muscle before moving over to the right to repeat the motion.

God damn, I wish I could see this. I bet it looks awesome. But I can’t make out anything other than shadows, which has me guessing his next move.

The nipple love starts out teasing, but once he gets back to the left one from the right, he's *really* devouring it; going to town. It feels crazy. Like something that shouldn't feel good, but it really does, so much that my toes are curling in the air and my balls are vibrating.

"Tauren…" I breathe his name on a moan as he pops off my nipple and returns to the other, flicking it with his tongue, sucking with force and then giving it a little nip for good measure.

"Do you like this?" he rumbles, skating his lips over to my armpit. Not quite in there, but just below it. Then I feel his tongue graze the area and I flinch because it tickles, but… *damn*. It also kind of feels good.

"Yes," I whisper as he kisses the spot again. My back arches to him, needing *more more more*.

But his warmth pulls away and I whine.

"So needy." He chuckles wickedly. "I'm glad you're trying this with me, Colson. After all, how can you know what you'll like if you don't try it?"

My brain is all scrambled from the winding up on my pleasure centers. But still, I totally get what he's saying. I needed to try being with a guy other than Cyrus to see if I liked it, I guess. And he needed to fool around with his stepsons to realize he's a gay Dom…?

Who knows, but whatever. This is amazing.

Suddenly, something lighter brushes my nipple. Something softer and much more… tickly. I jerk into the feeling, trying to figure out what it is as it circles my painfully peaked flesh. It dances across my chest to the other one and my mind clicks.

"Is that a…"

"A feather," Tauren mumbles, the amusement clear in his voice while he tickles me. "It was on the nightstand. Felt like an opportunity, you know?"

He holds onto my thigh harder with his left hand, keeping my legs spread as much as they can while his feather swoops its way around my nipples, making circles and circles and circles of achingly peculiar pleasure until I'm about to explode.

I yank at the restraint on my wrist, the rope biting into my flesh. But I can't even pretend I don't like it. I do, *a lot*. Actually, the feeling of the feather tickling my sensitive skin is mixing with the sting of pain on my wrists and ankles in a way that has me breaking out in a sweat. It's crazy, but just like earlier when I was about to come just from Cyrus's dick

rubbing against mine, it really feels like I could burst just from Tauren teasing my nipples. My dick is bobbing around on my abs, waiting anxiously for some attention so it can blow.

And sure enough, the feather continues its journey down my torso, tracing tickling lines through my muscles. It purposely moves around my dick, onto my inner thighs, which are insanely ticklish for some reason, then onto my balls. The feather stops there and gets comfortable, brushing my nuts again and again while my cock continues to leak a sticky mess all over my abs.

"Fuck," I mewl out a hoarse sound, and Tauren growls in response, shifting his hips against the underside of my ass. "*Fuck…*" I groan again now that I can feel the long, hard shape of him pressing into me.

"You're so sexy," he rumbles, and my heart melts in my chest. "Look at how big your dick gets for me. I want to watch it come again like earlier. *No hands.*"

I'm fucking dizzy. Everything he's doing and saying is marvelous and I want to *come*, but I also understand how much better it will feel if I hold out for a little while. *Yum.*

I squirm at the idea just as the feather is caressing down… from my balls to my ass and that tender spot in between.

"You deserve to be worshipped too, baby," he rumbles while rutting his clothed erection into me and teasing me to the point of tears. "You deserve to feel all the pleasure of a good boy."

Suddenly, the feather runs back up and brushes along the length of my erection, causing it to jerk, a quiet hum erupting from my throat.

"That looks so fucking good," Tauren tells me, and I feel him moving around, like he's doing something though I can't tell what.

It feels like he's taking off his pants.

"Holy fuck," I rasp at the idea that he might actually fuck me again.

I could never admit it, but I've been craving it like a damn junkie since last night. And now that I'm strung up like his fucktoy, all I want in the entire world is to be split in half by his massive cock again.

Tauren shifts, and I feel warm breath on my ass. He presses a soft kiss on my cheek. "Good boys have their asses played with, like naughty little sluts. Is that what you want, Colson?"

"God, yes." I try to wriggle closer to him, but it's no use. I can't move. He's in complete control.

“Are you my good little slut, or my bad little slut?” he asks in that velvety smooth voice.

He sounds devilish, and I’m distracted from his question until I feel a sharp sting on the meat of my ass cheek.

Oh my God, I think he just bit me.

Even more precum throbs from my cock.

“Answer me, Colson,” he growls.

I don’t know… I don’t know if he wants me to be good or bad. Honestly, it could go either way.

“G-good?” I mumble, trembling so hard I’m almost convulsing, the pounding of pain where his teeth connected synching with the thump in my balls.

“Say it,” he hisses, then bites me again, harder.

“*Fuck*, I’m your good l-little slut,” I stutter, squeezing my hands into fists above the rope.

Tauren hums. “Good boy, baby. You’re doing so well for me.” He kisses the spot on my ass that’s throbbing in pain, and it feels…

It feels *amazing*.

While I’m still processing what just happened, the sensation of slippery fingers between my ass cheeks causes me to jump. Tauren ignores it, though, and swirls them around and around on my asshole until I relax.

“Remember, if it’s too much you can tell me to stop,” he rumbles. I can hear how keyed up he is by the gravelly spring of his voice. He doesn’t want to stop, and I sure as fuck don’t want him to either.

So I press my lips together to hold in my cries and any traitorous words that might slip out.

The tip of his finger continues to circle my rim until *finally* it begins to nudge. He drives it inside me, and I accept it willingly; that long, masculine digit sinking as deep as it can.

“*Fuuuck* yes,” I whine as he pulls it out, then guides it back in, painfully slow.

It doesn’t hurt, since I was already fingered today and fucked last night. I guess my ass is good-to-go at this point. The desire for him to really break me in is all I can think about while his hand moves at a glacial pace.

“*Colson*.” His voice comes out all raspy, like sex for my ears. Seriously, I want to listen to him say my name on repeat for hours, to the music of my favorite song.

I can't believe I hated him like a day ago… Wow.

"T-tauren," I whisper back to him, and he groans.

"Your ass is so snug." His hips move in tempo with his hand, a second finger joining the first. "So tight and hot… and soft. Jesus, you feel good."

Put your dick in me. Please please please.

His fingertips brush against my prostate and an uncontrollable sob breaks from my lips. It feels so fucking good I don't even know what to do with myself. All my muscles are bunched up, save for the ones below my waist, welcoming his sexy fingers deep in my ass.

Tauren's hips are just rippling into me, grinding and grinding away on my ass and thigh, as if he's pretending he's fucking me. His hard cock is rubbing against my legs, poking me in the pelvis. It feels incredible, yes, but the craving for him to replace those long fingers with his even longer dick is visceral.

It's primal. I *need* it, on some kind of level I'm not sure I'll ever understand.

"You look so good like this, baby." I feel him hovering over me as a third finger pushes into my tight hole, prompting a louder groan. "This is what you needed, isn't it? You need to be driven insane with pleasure, until you're panting for breath like you are right now."

My body is winding up like a rubber band, sweat dampening my flesh all over when I feel Tauren's breath over the head of my cock. He continues to work his fingers in my ass, his tongue swiping my crown.

"God, you taste so good," he growls and my cock lurches, like it's trying to fling itself into his mouth. He licks again and I shudder. "Give me that sweet sweet, good boy."

"Uhhfuckyesohmygod." The words come out in a stream while Tauren punishes me with pleasure, stroking my prostate with his fingers and sucking the head of my cock between his lips.

"I want more, I need more…" His voice trails off in an animalistic grunt as he pulls his fingers out of my ass.

I feel bereft, empty. But only for a split second before the fat, smooth round head of his dick pushes up to my hole.

"Take this cock, gorgeous," he hisses, pushing his slick erection inside me.

One. Slow. Agonizing. Inch. At. A. Time.

"*Fuuuck me*, Tauren, fuck me fuck me…"

My brain explodes.

My cock erupts.

The second his dick reaches all the way inside me, I come so fucking hard I can't breathe.

Th pleasure is washing over me like wave after crashing wave. My balls are contracting over and over and fucking over again, long, aching pulses of cum shooting all over me while Tauren stays completely still, nine rock solid inches of dick resting inside my body.

"That is…" he breathes, pressing kisses all over my sticky flesh while my ass tightens and releases on him for what feels like hours. "The most beautiful thing… I've *ever* seen. Good boy, Colson. You're coming *so good* for me."

"I… I'm… *fuck*…" I can't speak coherently. I'm breathing like I just got back into the atmosphere.

I barely know where I am, who I am, what I am.

All I know is that he's a fucking *genius,* this man. Because I have never felt this serene in my entire life.

"Gorgeous," he pants, licking up cum from my chest. "Sweet. Delicious… *Perfect*." He kisses the word over and over on my abs, my legs, even my feet, which usually I'd think is weird, but I can't find it in myself to think negative thoughts right now.

I feel… *good*.

More than good. I'm great, wonderful, stupendous. *Perfect*.

After a beat, while I float back down onto solid ground, Tauren shifts and it reminds me that his dick is still inside me, and quite hard. And not that I need more, but I definitely *want* more. I think I might be addicted to him, which is a real problem if we're considering consequences, which I am not.

Writhing my ass against him, I give it a little wiggle, moving his dick enough to brush my prostate once more. A soft cry leaps from my lips before I bite the bottom one.

"You're still pretty naughty for a good boy," he rumbles with an audible grin in his voice, then leans forward and nuzzles his nose and mouth into the crook of my neck. My eyes practically roll back in my head.

"I want you to come," I whisper, more hoarse than I've ever been before, and that includes the time I spent hours screaming my favorite Bert McCracken lyrics until I threw up.

“You sound beyond sexy,” he hums, as if reading my mind. “Your voice is so…” he trails off for a moment, then sighs, “hot.”

I can’t believe how into me he seems right now. It’s… crazy. But like, in a good way. I always thought he wanted Cyrus. And maybe he still does. But now it seems like he also wants me.

I wonder what Cy would think about that.…

“Say more sexy things,” he rumbles on my skin, then pumps his cock into me, deep. So deep a garbled cry leaves my lips.

“Come in me,” I plead, my wrists and ankles burning from the rope. “Come anywhere in me, *please*. I want to overflow with your cum, Daddy Tauren.”

“Fuck,” he roars, then tears his hips back, driving deep into me with punishing thrust after thrust.

The bed is banging against the wall as he pounds me like a madman, the sound of his hips slapping my ass echoing through the room. His hand slides up to my throat, and he holds on tight, drilling me deeper and deeper.

“Baby, your sweet cunt is gonna make me… *come*.”

Suddenly, he pulls out of me. He quickly straddles my chest, presses his dick up to my mouth and shoves the head inside through my grunt of surprise. But I don’t hesitate. I suck him hard for only five seconds before he’s pouring his hot load into my mouth.

It’s thick as it decorates my tongue, but I swallow it back, moaning and rumbling as I go.

“Drink me down, baby.” His voice cracks through his climax. “*Yess*… good boy. Good fucking boy.”

When his dick finishes pulsing into my mouth, he lets out a content sigh and tugs it free, sliding back down my body. He unties the rope from my wrists and ankles, rubbing them gently in his strong hands.

“How do you feel?” he asks, removing the scarf from over my eyes.

Blinking myself back to reality, I peek at him as he lies down next to me.

“Warm.” I speak without vetting my words. “Comfortable. *Happy*…”

He smiles, a lazily beautiful, Colgate white thing that is truly dazzling. Then presses a tender kiss to my lips. It’s soft, sweet and… romantic.

It melts through every inch of dark stuff in my chest.

“You feel… different,” he mumbles, running his lips down my throat. “Have you stopped hating me?”

He snorts a laugh into my neck, and I roll my eyes. But my own smile is fucking relentless right now.

“I guess you’re not so bad,” I mutter teasingly with a dreamy grin on my lips. “When you take that armor off.”

Tauren stills. His entire body seems to freeze in time, his muscles stiff as he slowly backs away from me. My smile falls while I gaze up at him, and him down at me, his forehead lined in confusion, sudden distress and something like… disbelief.

His mouth drops open, but nothing comes out.

“What’s wrong…?” I mumble, nervousness having replaced the happiness from just seconds ago.

His eyes slide down from my face, onto my torso. He lifts a finger and traces one of my tattoos. Then another, then another.

“He wanted to keep his shirt on…” he whispers.

My brows knit. “Huh?”

“When you’re ready to take that armor off… I’ll be upstairs.” His eyes snap back to mine, and they’re wide, etched with baffled rage. “It was you, wasn’t it? *You* said that to me last night… Not Cyrus.”

A dreadful chill washes over me. *Uh oh.*

I shake my head, but I can’t bring myself to lie. *It shouldn’t be a big deal, right?? Why does he look so pissed…?*

“That’s why you wanted to keep your shirt on… to hide the tattoos.” He narrows his furious gaze at me, sitting up slowly and putting distance between us. “You pretended to be Cyrus…”

“Tauren, look…” I sit up next to him, pausing because I don’t even know what to say. What should my defense be here? I’m at a loss.

“You fucking played me.” The wrath he’s shooting at me through his blue irises feels like flames licking my skin. “Why would you do that? Why would you fuck with me like that??”

His voice raises in volume with each word, until he’s almost shouting in my face. I try inching away from him, but he grabs me by the arm so hard I’m sure I’ll have bruises.

“Tauren, relax,” I stammer. “I didn’t mean to upset you, I just—”

“How long?” he snaps, and I’m trembling under his withering glare. “How long have you been pretending to be him??” I’m shaking, unable to catch my breath. “Answer me, Colson, goddammit, or I swear to God…”

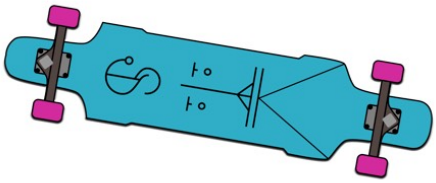
“I… I’m… sorry,” I mumble, because it’s all I can think to say.

Tauren’s face reddens in his anger. His eyes grow dark as he grabs me by the throat. “You’re not sorry yet, bad twin… But you will be.”

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CYRUS



P *ow!*

Quixotic music fills my ears as I recline on the couch. My playlist is much more relaxing than Colson's. Don't get me wrong, I love his music when *he* plays it. But if I'm just chilling out, reading comics and letting the playlist roll, like right now, I prefer something more calming.

M83, Foster The People, Empire of the Sun, just to name a few. Electric beats and smooth melodies. Sometimes they don't even need lyrics.

Or as Colson calls it, *blasphemy*.

My lips curl into a small grin at the thought of him. His growly personality that he thinks defines him. Maybe it does… He's much more popular than me, after all. I can't even imagine what it would feel like to be loved or feared by so many people. I don't get the admiration of my peers, except for maybe my dorky friends. I'm only ever gassed up by adults; teachers, or Mom's friends. Deep down, I've always wished I could be more like Colson.

My smile drops from my lips when I remember that he's been avoiding me. And Tauren.

Colson avoiding Tauren is pretty normal, but he doesn't ignore me. He can't… even if he wants to, which I'd like to think he doesn't. But even if we *wanted* to keep ourselves separate, we couldn't.

We're the only pieces to our two-person puzzle. Like one of those broken-heart best friend necklaces. We seal together to make *us* whole.

I don't want him to be upset, but then I'm also not sure how to stop it from happening. Colson is possessive. For a year, he's hated that I have

feelings for Tauren, and now that he knows it's more than just friendly from the other side, I'm expecting his anger will take over.

And I'm afraid of what that means.

"What would you do, Batman?" I mutter to the comic I'm reading. It's one of my favorites. I've read it a million times.

Batman versus Bane. Bane breaks Batman's back. Pretty intense.

Plus, all the *Boom! Thunk! Swish!* Et cetera.

One earbud in, I'm resting on the couch in the living room, facing the large bay window that looks out over our infinity pool, the ocean just beyond that. It's a spectacular view. The sun has been gone for a bit, and I've just been hanging out, trying to distract myself from the blatant insanity going on in this house… The awesome stuff that's happened, which will undoubtedly need to be swept under the rug when Mom comes home tomorrow.

I really have no discernible idea how we'll make that happen, and it hurts to think about it. But then, I'm used to pushing away my feelings. And yes, I thought maybe finally coming to terms with my sexuality might have changed things for me… But I suppose that was a foolish notion.

Nothing changes. Life is difficult, and it never won't be.

My eyes linger on Batman as he tells me to get over myself. *Stop whining. My back's broken, you don't see me crying about it. Man up.*

My face scrunches at him. "Okay, jeez. Someone's cranky."

Lower Your Eyelids To Die With The Sun comes to a slow end, my playlist launching into the next song up, which is a change in genre. It's *Gravity* by John Mayer.

I also love John Mayer. His voice is so soothing.

Closing my eyes, my smile returns when I remember me begging Colson to play *Your Body Is A Wonderland* and him rolling his eyes a million times and calling me a *girl*, before eventually conceding to my request.

The way he kissed me afterward makes my toes curl now.

The smooth riff of John's guitar in my ear, however, is disrupted by a loud bang just outside. My eyes snap open as I sit up slowly. Through the window, I see Colson stumble out of the pool house… naked.

Dropping my comic, I sit up farther, popping out my earbud.

Colson looks worried… bordering on scared as he backs away from something. And then the thing that's scaring him comes into view.

It’s Tauren. Also naked and appearing downright enraged as he stalks toward Colson. I think he’s yelling, but I can’t hear what he’s saying. Then he lunges. Colson dodges it, his hands up like he’s trying to calm Tauren out of attacking him.

“Jesus Christ.” I jump up from the couch, darting toward the back door.

Once outside on the veranda, I can hear better. And I immediately know why Tauren is freaking out.

“You think it’s okay to fuck with people’s heads like that?!” Tauren barks, chasing Colson as he backs away quickly. “You think you can just do *whatever* you want with no consequence or concern??”

Shit… So Tauren knows. This is not good.

I don’t know why they’re naked, though it wouldn’t take a me-level genius to figure it out. They were clearly alone in the pool house…

Swallowing down the jealousy that’s trying to come up my throat like bile, I step tentatively closer to where they’re arguing. I need to focus on breaking up this fight, not on what was most likely happening in the pool house… without me.

“Tauren, please,” Colson fumbles, backing up slowly. I’ve never seen him so worried. *Even when our father was beating the shit out of him…* I gulp at the awful memory. “I’m trying to tell you I’m sorry… I’m trying to *explain—*”

“I don’t want a goddamn explanation!” Tauren roars, advancing on my brother. “I want to fucking hurt you.”

“No, you don’t,” Colson mumbles, his voice catching in an uncharacteristic show of emotion that slinks up my spine.

“*Yes*, I fucking *do*, Colson,” Tauren counters. “Your games *hurt* people. You need to understand that.”

“I do!” Colson gasps. “I do, and I’m sorry. Please, what can I do??”

I’m freaking *shocked* that my brother is reacting this way. Usually, Colson goes toe-to-toe with people who are challenging him, and he never admits when he’s wrong. It’s startling to see him falling in line the way he is.

But unfortunately, Tauren doesn’t seem appeased. He lunges for Colson again, who’s right by the edge of the pool.

My brother’s face flicks behind him for a split second before he tumbles off the edge into the water. I dash forward, watching with terror in my eyes as Tauren leaps after him into the pool.

It’s deep enough that neither of them would be hurt, thank God. But I should probably save my relief. Because as soon as Colson emerges from the surface of the water, Tauren is right back to chasing him.

“You guys, stop!” I stumble up to the edge, watching on helplessly as Tauren tackles my brother in the water.

It’s hard to tell what’s happening. It’s a tussle if I’ve ever seen one, limbs flailing all over the place, water splashing. When Tauren comes back up, he has his hand around Colson’s throat.

I’m fucking terrified.

He’s possessed with a rage I’ve never seen on him before, jaw clenched visibly as he pushes my brother’s head under water. At first, Colson doesn’t make any move to stop him. He’s *letting* Tauren try to drown him, which makes no fucking sense.

My heart is in my throat as I kneel down by the edge of the pool and shout, “Tauren, stop! Let him up!”

But he’s ignoring me. Colson’s black hair is fluttering under the clear water, and when I catch a glimpse of his face, I see his eyes open. He and Tauren are staring at each other, and it’s the strangest, most intense thing I’ve ever witnessed.

It feels like minutes have passed as Tauren keeps Colson’s head under the water, but I think it’s really only a few seconds. My pulse is echoing in my skull, blood rushing in my ears so loud I can barely hear myself screaming for him to stop.

Finally, Colson begins to fight, likely running out of air as his fists splash about, launching punches at Tauren’s chest and arms. But Tauren just won’t fucking pull him up. It’s like he’s lost… His sanity has been whisked away in this fit of fury and betrayal.

“Tauren, *Jesus*!” I grab his shoulders and shake him. “Let him up now! He can’t breathe!”

Tauren’s head wobbles, and he blinks hard, roaring out loud as he pulls Colson up from the water by his throat. Colson coughs and sputters for a couple of seconds, blinking rapidly at Tauren’s face as water tumbles from his hair.

“What the fuck…” Tauren growls under his breath.

And then his lips are on my brother’s.

The kiss is so hard, *I* can feel it. I can’t tell if he’s kissing Colson or breathing life back into him. Maybe both. Colson’s hands float limp by his

sides in his obvious shock at what's happening, but only for a moment before they slide up Tauren's bare chest. His right hand grips Tauren's pectoral muscle, right over his heart while he succumbs to the ferocity of the older man kissing him wildly.

And I'm just sitting at the edge of the pool, staring on as their tongues touch and their wet lips move. My hand lifts to rub absentmindedly over that spot on my chest. The jealousy of seeing two people I love kissing stings like a blade puncturing the organ just beneath my hand.

But even though it hurts, a buzz of electricity zaps me in the groin. My dick jerks to life as an aching tightness spreads up my chest, twisting everything around. It reminds me of the first time I looked at Colson in a way that was more lustful than brotherly… And the first time I saw Tauren, when he smiled at me and I knew my feelings for him were going to be very inconvenient.

These are the things I see when I watch them kissing each other desperately.

My fingers dig into the stone beneath me as Tauren yanks his mouth away from my brother's, breathing heavily. Colson's lids are hooded while he catches his breath, gazing up at our stepdad with stars in his eyes brighter than those above our heads. I bite my lip.

The staring between them seems to last an eternity. Tauren sucks on his lower lip, his thumb grazing Colson's Adam's apple. Then his eyes flick to me.

And Colson's eyes flick to me.

And I just blink at both of them, lips parted, with absolutely no idea what to say.

Tauren's jaw drops while he gapes at me, many moments of silence passing before he shoves my brother away from him by his throat. "Did you know…?"

I glance at Colson, whose wide green eyes are identical to mine in our shared moment of panic.

"You did, didn't you?" Tauren sighs. Honestly, he looks heartbroken. I feel awful… and *I* didn't even necessarily do anything.

"I found out last night… after it… happened," I tell him. Looking to Colson again, I find his scowl is back as he rolls his eyes, running fingers through his wet hair.

“I…” Tauren’s voice quavers subtly while he stares at me, the blue in his eyes matching the sparkling water he’s wading in. “I thought it was you.”

Nodding calmly, I mumble, “I know.”

There’s some sort of unspoken flow between us, like calm waves at low tide. Even though he was with Colson last night, he knows I’ve wanted him. And apparently… he’s wanted me too.

Tauren’s eyes harden at Colson. “I can’t believe you fucking did this…”

Colson’s jaw visibly stiffens. “I’m so fucking sorry to disappoint you,” he scoffs sarcastically, that defensive hostility angling his features. He grabs onto the edge of the pool and hoists himself out of the water. I’m not trying to linger on the fact that he’s naked, but it’s hard to miss. “I’ll just get out of your hair, then.”

He stomps toward the house, dripping wet, without even bothering to go for a towel. When I glance at Tauren, I find him watching my brother, regret zipping his brows together. Then he peeks at me. He doesn’t speak, but I can read his face…

He’s confused by all of this. The three of us are tangled beyond anything a simple attraction could have predicted. I wish I had some kind of comfort to give him, something I could say or do that would ease his mind and his troubled heart.

But I can’t. I’m just as torn up as he is.

Shaking my head, I whisper, “I’m sorry, Tauren.” Then I nod in the direction of the house, where Colson just disappeared into. “I have to go after him. He’s… my brother.”

My everything. The other half of my heart.

Tauren is obviously upset, but I force myself to look away, rising to my feet and stalking quickly back to the house. It’s painful not looking after him, but I know Colson needs me right now. And if I stay out there, Colson will think I picked Tauren over him.

I don’t want to have to choose…

Following the trail of water through the house, I make my way upstairs to my brother’s bedroom. Pausing outside the door, I knock gently, but there’s no answer, though I hear the shower turning on from within his bathroom. Opening the door, I step slowly into the room, my eyes going immediately to the bathroom door, which is open a crack.

“Col?” I call to him, walking carefully toward his bathroom. I’m not sure if he’s going to be pissed at me…

Really, this is all his fault. I don’t know why he pretended to be me… And I’d like an answer to that question, too. But I also know that my brother is very complicated. There are probably more layers to it than even he understands.

Pushing his bathroom door open a bit more, my eyes immediately settle on him. He’s still naked, standing outside his shower stall with his hand under the flow of water.

“What do you want, Cyrus?” He sighs, sounding as exhausted as he looks. There are visible circles under his eyes, which pains me to witness.

I know he struggles with sleep. It sucks, and based on how out of sorts he’s seemed lately, I’m concerned about what’s going on with his therapy, and the meds he’s supposed to be taking.

“I don’t want anything,” I mumble, shifting in place as he steps into the shower, closing the glass door, though I can obviously still see him through it. “I’m making sure you’re okay.”

“News flash, Cy. You can’t make me *okay*.” He dunks his face beneath the water. “No one can. I’m not like you… and I never will be.”

I blink at him, baffled by what he’s saying. “You think *I’m* okay?”

“I don’t *think*, I *know*,” he grumbles, squirting shampoo in his palm, then lathering it into his hair. “You’re the good twin, remember? I’m just the leftover bullshit that never should’ve happened.”

“What the fuck are you even talking about?” I gasp, whipping the door to the stall open. He gives me a startled look. “Col, you’re…” My voice cuts out for a moment, and I shake my head. “Do you even know how important you are?”

Vulnerability glistens in his eyes for a moment, like the rarest of diamonds, and he looks at the floor to hide it. “I’m not important, Cyrus. I’m like a disease. I destroyed you… I destroy *everything*. Dad was right…”

I can’t believe what I’m hearing. The harsh stab of empathy in my chest for my twin is palpable as I whisper, “Fuck that.”

Whipping my shirt over my head, I move onto my pants, removing them with my boxers. Ignoring Colson’s look of surprise, I step inside the shower with him, warm water immediately cascading over my body. Colson backs up against the wall, his wary gaze stuck on me.

I don’t even really know what I’m doing. But I know what I *know*… and I need him to know it, too.

Grabbing him gently, I drape my arms around his shoulders, fusing him to me. His warm naked body presses into mine, and sure, it feels good. And yes, my dick likes it, but it’s not about that. Tucking my face into the crook of his neck, I sweep my lips over his wet flesh, and I feel him shivering.

Only a moment later, his arms finally circle my waist. And he holds me back.

Our hearts beat together, the same tempo, just like they always have.

We stand in silence for a while beneath a waterfall shower head, my fingers at the nape of his neck, and his on my back.

“I didn’t mean to fuck everything up,” he eventually whispers by my ear. I nod slowly. *I know*. “I never do…”

“You haven’t fucked everything up,” I tell him quietly. “That’s impossible.”

He huffs. “Sure, genius. I definitely fucked *some* stuff up.”

“Maybe.” My lips move on his warm, wet skin. “But your heart is good, Colson. Dad was *not* right.”

“Yes, he was,” he argues.

“No,” I snap back, gently. “He wasn’t. You didn’t destroy me, or ruin me or whatever. If anything, I ruined you.”

He pulls his face back enough to look at me. “Have you been smoking my weed?”

Chuckling, I shake my head while he keeps fighting against his grin. “You know what I’m saying, Col. I’m not the good twin. I’m not *good* at all. I’m in love with my Mom’s husband. And my…”

My voice cuts out and I swallow, eyes flicking to his for a moment before they move away once more.

I can’t bring myself to say it. It’s something I’ve never admitted out loud. And despite what we do in the dark, there’s always been an unspoken agreement…

I’m not supposed to love him like I do.

Colson is giving me a very intense look, like he’s part terrified of me, and part… just as enamored as I am. Swept up in the *wrong* fucking person.

His lips part. And for a brief, sparkling moment of anticipation, I think he might say it.

I can almost hear it, in his deep, raspy voice. *I’m in love with you, too.*

But he doesn’t. The words never leave his mouth. They stay stuck inside there, and I should be glad about it, because we *can’t*.

But that doesn’t make it hurt any less.

There are still so many things we need to say, but it’s late, and we’re both exhausted. So instead of breaching the contract of our wicked hearts, we wash each other up in silence. When we’re done, we step out of the shower and get dressed. And I go to my bedroom, while he stays in his.

Keeping ourselves *apart*, because it’s the right thing to do.

Even though nothing has ever felt more *wrong*.



I MUST HAVE CAUGHT Colson’s sleeplessness, because my brain just won’t shut the hell up tonight. In all honesty, it happens to me sometimes too, though nowhere near as bad. My anxiety keeps my mind running all the time. Usually, I’m able to distract myself with reading and music, saving the angst-ridden thoughts for during the day.

Not tonight.

I can’t stop thinking about what’s happened so far over the course of what I’m sure historians will one day call *the most bonkers weekend of all time*. It’s actually ridiculous how much has gone down in just a couple of days… Between me having my first kiss with someone who isn’t my brother, my second non-brother kiss with my stepdad, finding out Colson pretended to be me and slept with said stepdad, the sexy dalliance in Tauren’s office—also known in my mind as *the greatest experience of my life*—then the terrifying sight of watching Tauren almost drown Colson in our pool.

The feelings and memories are on a nonstop loop in my heart and head, dangling sleep frustratingly out of reach. It’s already two-thirty in the morning and I have no hope of ever passing out. And really, too much is going on to waste time on sleep anyway, especially with the looming knowledge that once Mom comes home, whatever special stuff was happening between Tauren and me—and Tauren and Colson—will have to stop, indefinitely.

Out of everything else that's up in the air, this is the one certainty. There's no hope of continuing any of this after my mother comes back. I don't know what Tauren will do with his new feelings, but he'll have to either leave my mom, or stuff it all down and stay married to her.

And in either scenario, I can't go near him again.

This was a one-time thing.

Scrubbing a hand over my chest, my watery eyes stay stuck on the ceiling. I don't want to lose it… How *right* it felt, with the three of us in his office. The idea that I'll never get that full, sweet wholeness again makes me want to cry. *I don't want to give it up before it's even started.*

Turning over onto my side in bed, I stare at my bedroom door. Wasn't it only twenty-four hours ago that Tauren snuck in through that door to be with me?

And sure, it wasn't *me*. But he thought it was… He wanted it to be.

He and Colson have something going on, this we know. That was clear from whatever was happening in the pool house that led to Tauren's attempted murder of my brother. But what about us? *Me* and Tauren.

We've been doing this strange dance for a while now… And when he kissed me, it was like two magnetic particles finally finding their ways together. It felt like something that *needed* to happen, or the world we know would cease to exist.

I want more of that. I want to feel it again… If only for tonight, since tonight is all we have.

Unable to hold myself back for one more second, I push out of bed and tiptoe to the door. Opening it slowly, I peek into the hallway. Colson's door on the right is closed. For a moment, I think about how many times he's snuck out of his room into mine.

When my heart calls, he comes running. *Every* time.

Then my face turns left, to the room at the far end of the hall. My mother and Tauren's bedroom.

But Mom isn't in there…

My nerves are jumping inside me with my pulse as I creep down the hall toward the door. When I reach it, I take a breath, wondering if I should knock. But I decide against it, turning the knob with shaky fingers.

Oh God, it's open.

Biting down on my lip, I push the door open a crack and peer inside the room. It's completely dark, minus a stream of light from the moon's glow,

reflecting off the ocean and shining in through the partially drawn curtains. *This bedroom has the best view…*

Sucking air into my lungs once more in hopes to steady my racing heartbeat, I summon my courage to step into the room, closing the door behind me. The giant bed stands before me, only one lump in the middle, buried beneath the covers. I swallow, my chest warming at the sight…

Tauren. I don't know how or why it would've happened… Why the universe would drop him into my life, only to make me fall desperately in love with him as something that belongs to my *mother*.

But no matter what, just like with Colson, when I'm looking at him, it's impossible to keep myself from walking forward. I'm not sure anything could hold me back.

Wandering over to the bed, I take a moment to just watch him. He's obviously sleeping, because the only things moving are his broad shoulders as he lies with his back to me. Lifting the blanket, I slide into the bed next to him, his smell instantly overwhelming me with *him*.

It's intoxicating. And *I don't want to think about the fact that this is also my mother's bed.*

Inching myself up to his back, I rest my head on the pillow and stare at the back of his head, his wavy caramel-colored hair kept short on the sides and slightly longer on top, the slope of his neck leading down to his muscular back. Reaching my finger out, I draw a line down his spine. He's only wearing boxers, which gives my dick a nice throb inside my pajamas.

He still hasn't woken up, and I don't necessarily *want* to wake him. He's probably exhausted. But then touching him is an absolute necessity. It's an itch impossible to keep from scratching, not while I'm surrounded by the warmth emanating from his strong body, and his delicious smell, like amber, fiery citrus, and ocean breeze filling my lungs.

Slinking my arm gently around his waist, my fingertips meet the hair of his happy trail running down the smooth skin that covers muscle so hard it's like stone to the touch. A chill rushes through me as I press my lips to his shoulder blade.

At that, he stirs, but not much. Just enough to let me know he might be waking up. The buzz inside me turns to a nervous thrill as I drag my lips along his smooth skin some more, tracing one of his tattoos. He lets out a hum, and before I know what's happening, he's spinning to face me.

My arm stays draped over his waist as he blinks sleepy eyes at me, the blue more vibrant than ever in this light. His hand lifts to my jaw, fingers tracing its line. I can't even help it… My eyelids flutter at his tender touch.

"Baby…" he whispers in the dark while his fingertips brush my lips, "is it really you?"

I nod as my eyes reopen, locking our gazes. "It's me." I pause, timidly, sliding a shaky hand up to his chest. "It's… Cyrus."

He lets out a breath, a quiet sigh of relief. And then he pulls my mouth to his and kisses the words, "*Thank God*," onto my lips.

In a blink, I'm melting everywhere. Feeling the reciprocated lust and desire of someone you've crushed on from afar for over a year is a shot of dopamine I couldn't possibly describe with words.

Unrequited love is like an illness that kills you slowly and painfully every single day. But moments like this… They're the cure. A tourniquet for those bleeding, loveless wounds.

Tauren's warm, silky mouth is my own personal heaven as he sneaks his tongue into mine, tasting my lips, licking them and sucking them between his. The noises he makes are like the best music I could ever imagine; little hums and gasps mingling with my own as we create a harmony together.

"I'm sorry." The words flee my throat of their own volition.

"For what?" he murmurs in between kissing me dizzy.

"I… I don't know." I chuckle sheepishly, and he grins on my mouth. "I just feel bad… I don't want you to be upset."

"I'm not upset with you," he whispers, rolling on top of me. "And I don't want to talk about him."

Swallowing, I gaze up at him, flushed and needy as hell. I nod in agreement with whatever will keep him doing what he's doing. "Okay."

"Okay," he sighs, then lifts my t-shirt up over my head, tossing it. "Mmm…" he hums, running his large hands down over my chest and my abs, going for the waist of my pants. "Get naked with me, baby."

Like I could ever say *no* to that.

I nod as he pushes my pants down, and I lift my hips so he can get them off my legs. I'm naked underneath my pajamas, and his hungry blue eyes lock on my erection for generous seconds before they slide back up to my face. I'm blushing hard, and all he has to do is bite his lip for precum to pulse onto my stomach.

Tauren gets up on his knees over my hips. "Take mine off."

Lifting my hands up to his boxer briefs, I slide them down slowly over his perfectly round ass until his big, thick cock flops out onto mine.

"*Mmmfuck*." The nonsense word comes up in a scratchy tone while Tauren wriggles out of his underwear the rest of the way.

He comes back to me immediately, pressing our stiflingly hot bodies together, his lips dropping to mine, firm and slow. His kisses are so blazingly passionate, it feels like we're slow dancing on the sun. I don't dance, but the way we're moving together is… *hypnotic*. Hips grinding, cocks rubbing and leaking while he holds my face and sucks my mouth numb.

"If you only knew…" he whispers as he lips descend my jaw, then my neck, "how badly I've wanted this from you."

I'm going to pass out. "Really?"

He nods, kissing my skin, tongue peeking out to taste as he does. "Yea. I know it's wrong… But Jesus, Cyrus, you're just… so fucking *beautiful*."

Now I'm really swooning. My body is liquid heat beneath him, like lava, and my heart is leaping up against my ribcage, trying to jump right into him.

"I've always thought you're beautiful," I tell him while he sucks on my neck until my toes curl. "Inside and out."

"You're so sweet," he tells me in a hushed voice, raspy with arousal. "I'm not a good person, Cyrus… I hope that doesn't scare you."

Trembling under him, my cock flinches into his. "Guess what?"

"What's that, baby?"

My hands run up his muscled arms as I whisper, "I'm not good either."

I feel his smile on the tender flesh of my neck. "Mmm… Sounds like we could have fun together."

My fingers slide up into Tauren's hair while he kisses around to my throat, then lifts to look down at me. I swear to God, this man is fucking breathtaking. Stealing every bit of my oxygen.

"Let me make you feel good, Cyrus," he breathes as his hand rests over my heart. His thumb brushes my nipple and I whimper. "Like I… Like I thought I did."

A flash of confused hurt glitters in his eyes. All I can do is nod slowly as he lowers his lips to mine and kisses me into a stupor.

After that, he's on a mission. He works his way down my body, licking and sucking at my nipples before proceeding down my abs, biting the

curves of muscle in my stomach. My dick jerks and drips at the pain, and he glances up at me, raising a cocky eyebrow that melts me into a puddle; twitching and live with an electrical lust current.

He keeps moving lower, flattening his tongue and licking a warm line up the length of my cock, ending it by sucking the head into his mouth.

"*Fuckyesss*," I mumble, arching up to his lips.

He rumbles and sucks me deeper, letting me push my cock into the back of his throat. He swallows on it, and I groan.

He pops off my dick abruptly, and I peek down to find him scolding me with a look. "I need you to be quiet, baby. Or I'll have to cover your mouth."

A frisson of excitement shoots through me. "You could do that… If you want."

His lips slant into a wicked smirk, but he crushes it and breathes over my dick, "You're being fresh."

He slides me into his mouth again, his velvety tongue cradling my shaft while he sucks slow but *hard*, like he's physically trying to pull the cum out of me. And he's doing a bang-up job, too. I know he's getting his fill of precum, because he swallows and hums.

My fingers caress his strong shoulders, sliding up into his hair, holding him in place while I writhe up to his hungry mouth gobbling my dick like his favorite meal. He works me over and over, sucking me into a trance until I feel like I'm about to come. My muscles stiffen, but somehow, he knows and glides off, grinning wickedly as he moves down to my balls.

"Not fair," I whine breathlessly.

He chuckles, tonguing my balls. "Behave, good twin. Or, I'm sorry… are you the bad one?" He glances up at me, cocking that eyebrow again while I squirm and shiver for more. "Mhm… I think you're *bad*."

I chomp down on my lip while Tauren sucks my nuts into his warm mouth, almost painfully. But the sting turns me on more, my lashes fanning, head tipping back in ecstasy as he licks and licks, nuzzling me until I'm so hot I'm sweating.

Suddenly, a different stab of pain shoots my eyes back open.

Holy fuck, he bit me. He bit my balls.

Glancing down at him, I can't help how my lips are quivering through rugged gasps. His eyes stay with mine as he licks the spot he just bit,

soothing the pain. But then he does it again, *harder*, and I hiss out a ragged cry.

"What did I say about being quiet?" he snarls, sending a new chill across my skin. He reaches over and grabs something. I think it's his boxers. "Open up." *Fuck. Me.* I part my lips without argument, but he snaps, "Wider."

I stretch my mouth, and he stuffs his boxers inside, filling it up almost entirely. Humming, I'm dizzy from how turned on I am. There's something that seems to click into place when he gets dominant with me. It's the same thing I've always felt with Colson… The need for pain and punishment. I don't understand it at all, but it feels like what I… deserve.

Tauren leans over me. "That's my bad little slut." My heart leaps at his words, like my own wayward term of endearment. He presses a kiss on my jaw, then moves back down between my legs. "Now I can make you *scream*."

I'm *tremoring* with need as he grabs me hard on the ass, lifting my hips. I look down to watch as he spreads me open and lowers his hot mouth between my cheeks.

Oh… dear… Lord.

His tongue is strong, wet, and warm as he eats me the fuck out, licking all over, making a sloppy mess. He stuffs it inside my ass, and I whimper behind the obstruction of his Calvins in my mouth. I'm going cross-eyed, he's eating me so hard. His tongue is actually fucking in and out of my asshole while he rumbles and growls, the sounds of wet devouring ringing through the room.

It feels fucking *fantastic*. I could definitely come just from this.

But of course, he stops before that happens. Sitting up, he wipes his mouth with his hand and breathes out a firm command, "Stay like this. Don't move." Then jumps off me, striding naked toward his closet.

I force myself to stay completely still, my ass up in the air, knees bent, and legs spread wide as my chest heaves through eager breaths. I'm not sure what he's doing, but when he returns, he's holding some sort of cloth in his one hand, and a bottle in the other.

He comes back to me in the bed, grasping both of my wrists. "Lift your arms over your head."

I do as he says, quaking with unbridled excitement as he proceeds to tie me to his headboard with what looks like the tie from my mother's

bathrobe. *Christ on a goddamn cracker…*

Tauren tugs at the silk once it's tied to make sure it's tight enough. Then he grins, satisfied. "You look… like a fucking prize right now. How do you feel?"

I murmur the word *amazing* through the boxers in my mouth, and he chuckles deviously. He grabs the bottle he brought over, which I now recognize as lube. Astroglide. *The good stuff.*

"I can't wait to fuck you, Cyrus," he hums, squeezing out lube and stroking it onto his many inches of cock.

My eyes can't move away from it. I know I've seen it before… I sucked it earlier. But the idea of that thing going inside me… Well, that's a thrill I've been dying to explore for a *long* time.

My chest is pulsing up and down with eager breaths as he swipes slick fingers between my ass cheeks. I can't help but pucker at his touch, and a low growl rumbles up his throat. He grabs my thighs, wedging himself in between and wrapping my legs around his waist.

Taking his erection in his hand, he slides it up and down over my hole, his head dropping forward. "*God*, Cy… I need you to be ready for this. I don't want to prime you. I don't want to coddle you. I just want to *fuck you* so hard you come to pieces beneath me." He pauses and lifts his chin to gaze down at me, a *starved* blue dominance shining in the dark. "Is that okay? Nod if it is."

I nod right away, fast and with zero chill. Tauren grins, biting it off his lip as he presses the head of his dick up to my ass.

"Relax for me, baby," he croons, out of breath and staring between my legs.

I'm beyond excited and nervous—*duh*—but I force myself to relax for him. Because I'll do literally *anything* this man tells me. Tauren says jump and I'm already in the air.

He nudges the fat head of his cock up to my hole, fighting against the resistance, but not for long before it slips inside me. I groan over the fabric in my mouth, and he lets out a hiss, pushing in more, *deeper*.

"*God, Jesus in Heaven,* that is so *fucking* sweet…" He comes down over me, sinking in more, deeper and farther into my body, feeding my greedy ass those slow inches until he's up to the hilt… With his pelvis on my ass and his dick touching my tonsils.

“Mm mm mmm.” Words try to flow from my mouth with nowhere to go as I yank on the restraint around my wrists.

He’s so thick, his giant cock stretching me, the burn of pain only serving to drive me *lust fucking crazy*. Tauren draws out a bit, then pumps back in, stroking in me gradually while his hands dance all over my chest, up my neck, then my arms, like he’s cherishing me with his touch while he fucks the air out of my lungs.

I’m already going out of my mind, lost in a haze of the most intense sensations of my life. Seriously, if you asked my name right now, I’d probably say, *Yes, Tauren, fuck me harder*, provided that I didn’t have underwear in my mouth and could actually speak.

I can’t believe this is only my second time having sex. But it works. For someone as perpetually anxious as I am, I think I’ve found what settles me. *Being tied up with a huge cock macerating me within an inch of my life.*

Tauren’s chest is dragging along the plane of mine, our sweat mingling together while his hips ripple into me, slow and hard, giving me every inch of his giant dick, pulling it away, then stuffing it back in, like he’s teasing me with it. Every time the swollen tip grazes my prostate, my eyes roll back in my skull and my ass clenches on him so hard he can barely move in me.

“You feel so fucking good stroking me, precious,” he grunts, sucking and biting on my collarbone. “Your ass is out of this world… So so tight, like a virgin pussy.”

I groan out loud, my dick engorged and leaking a sticky mess all over us both. His mouth is beyond filthy and it’s the best thing I’ve ever heard, a soundtrack to the moves we’re making. Or rather, *he’s* making, on me. *Taking me for a ride.*

Not that I necessarily want to think about it right now, but whatever Colson ripped out of this man, I should definitely be thanking him. And I think Tauren should, too.

I highly doubt whatever he does with my mother is this satisfying.

Okay, ew… Bad train of thought. Let’s forget about that…

And I would never, *ever* admit it to anyone, because it just proves that I’m a little freak… But the fact that I’m fucking my mother’s husband in her bed makes me so goddamn hard, I think I’m having a mini orgasm.

Precum throbs from my cock at the thought… All over her husband’s muscular body.

Jesus, I’m sick.

I’m so fucking sick… And I’m gonna fucking come.

Tauren is blissfully unaware of the crazy train rushing through my mind. Maybe. Or maybe he’s having some perverse thoughts of his own, because he’s pumping into me harder and harder, growling as he lifts up just enough to look me in the eye.

“I want you to come with my cock in your tight little ass, baby,” he breathes, holding my thighs apart wide as he pushes and pulls between them. “I wanna watch cum pour out of you. Can you do that for me, wicked little slut?”

I nod frantically, already feeling the orgasm sprinting up to the surface. Dipping my chin, I watch the gorgeous man fucking me into the mattress, his bronzed muscles decorated in occasional ink flexing while he stuffs me full of cock. The *slap slap slap* of his skin on mine is what does it in the end.

That, and imagining my mother walking in right now.

I know, I’m twisted. Just leave me alone to fuck my stepdad in peace.

The climax crests, and I tumble over, sobbing behind his boxers in my mouth while stream after powerful stream of cum jets from my cock, shooting all the way up to my throat.

“That’s it, gorgeous,” he sighs, still thrusting, though it’s slowed way down. “Come for me. Come so fucking good for me, precious. Look at all that sweet, sweet cum…”

He rips the material out of my mouth fast and kisses me, hard, letting me gasp hoarse cries into his mouth. “*Tauren.*.. Tauren Tauren Tauren… yes yes *yes*.”

He swipes my cum with his fingers, shoving them up to my mouth, and I lick it off without any instruction. Then he kisses me, in between feeding me more of my own cum so he can suck it off my lips.

It’s *deliciously* dirty and the most incredible thing I’ve ever done.

“I’m gonna come so deep inside you, Cyrus,” he whimpers like he’s about to break.

“Come in me, Tauren,” I croak, wishing I had my hands so I could touch him. “*Please*, fill me up.”

“You’re so fucking perfect,” he gasps. “Fuck, I’m… *coming*.”

My ass tightens on his cock while it throbs and pulses, filling me with his contractions as his face drops into the crook of my neck and he breathes out raspy words of praise.

You're fucking beautiful, baby. You feel so good. You're everything I've been wanting, precious, please… don't… stop…

I'm not sure what he means by *don't stop*, since he's the one nailing me to the bed. But I don't care. His words are great, but I'm sailing the seven seas with the ocean wind in my face right now.

Or better yet, I'm *finally* with my Batman…

My dark knight. On top of the Gotham precinct, beneath the Bat signal. Getting railed.

So hot.

Eventually, Tauren stops moving and sort of liquifies on top of me. We lie together for many minutes in the quiet darkness of his bedroom, catching our breath. By the time he lifts himself up on shaky arms, my dried cum between us is like peeling glue off your skin. It makes us both giggle.

"Oh shit… sorry," he murmurs, going for the bathrobe tie around my wrists.

"Thank you," I sigh as he kisses my wrists over and over, rubbing them gently.

"So polite." He grins. But then it falls off his mouth, and he gives me a strange look.

I don't know what it means, but he drops my wrists and glances all over my torso for a moment, as if he's looking for something. It takes my hazy brain a few extra seconds to realize he's checking for tattoos. To make sure I'm *me*, not Colson.

Something I did must have reminded him of Colson… when he was pretending to be me.

I know Tauren's upset, but it's truly a captivating thought. I mean… I know my brother, and he obviously knows me, better than anyone. There's a reason identical twins pretend to be each other in movies, because it works. If I wanted to pretend to be Colson, I could do it in a heartbeat. I could paint my nails, muss up my hair and scowl. *Cover up my lack of tattoos, and it's a cakewalk.*

But I've never thought of doing it. I never needed to… which leaves me to wonder, once again, why he did.

What does he need that he isn't getting as himself?

The answer seems pretty obvious… Attention. Not from me, but from everyone else. And the thing is, I always thought he got enough elsewhere

to make up for not getting it at home. Hence the reason he's always out with his friends.

But now, after the drama he's created, I'm thinking maybe he stays out all the time because he feels like he doesn't belong here. And it aches my heart for my twin. I feel so much of his pain, it's like I'*m* him in this moment.

"What's wrong?" Tauren whispers, cupping my jaw.

I blink up at him, parting my lips to tell him. But then he shifts his hips and I'm reminded that he's still inside me. A small whine escapes me, and he smirks, pulling his cock out of my ass slowly. It feels… wild.

"Mmm… that looks incredible," he rumbles as he watches the cum flow from my ass all over the place.

"We made a mess." My cheeks flush with humility.

"Oh, we most certainly did." He nestles up next to me, pulling me into his arms. "I like it."

Snuggling against his warm, strong body, I feel a calm wash over me; a protection. It's absolutely splendid. But after a minute or so, my mind goes back up the hall.

"I think you should forgive him," I whisper. And Tauren's lips, grazing all over my sticky skin, come to a halt.

He doesn't move to look at me. Simply runs his fingers up and down my back as he asks, "Why?"

"Because… even if he wanted to hurt either of us, he kind of has a good reason."

"Hm. And what would that be?" His tone is a bit incredulous, which I can't blame him for.

"Tauren." I pull my face back to look at him, raising my brow in a way that says this should be obvious. "You're a smart guy. Come on."

He huffs a small chuckle. "You are fresh, aren't you?" He kisses me softly, then sighs. "He's jealous." I nod, and he goes quiet for a moment. "Tell me why."

"Well… I've been… *have had* feelings for you since pretty much the first day we met." I gulp down my insecurities.

I can feel Tauren staring at me, but I'm afraid to look at him, my eyes staying between us until he tugs on my chin. I let our gazes meet, and the wondrous sparkle in his is sheerly brilliant.

"And how long have you had feelings for him?" Tauren asks.

This time I chuckle, shaking my head. “Oh, Tauren… my entire fucking life.”

The look he’s giving me isn’t one of disgust. And I guess that’s something else we can share now… Knowing we aren’t *good* people. It’s such a relief, it feels like pounds of weight are floating off my shoulders.

“So Colson feels like I’m going to take you away?” he asks quietly, sympathy etching his features.

“I think he feels like you’ve already taken me.” I swallow down my guilt. “But it’s… there’s more to it. I don’t think he’s as confident in himself as I always assumed he was. He’s so complex. The most complicated person I know. It’s a permanent mental maze being Colson Becker.”

Tauren’s gaze goes far away for a moment, as if he’s remembering something. “He’s struggling.” I nod slowly. “Well… he still went about it the wrong way.”

“Sure. He tends to do that.”

Tauren lets out a strong breath. “You’re so wise, baby. A sweet, kind, just… *amazing* person.” He kisses me again. “I wish… I wish it wasn’t like this.”

My chest throbs in agony. I know what he means. He doesn’t need to elaborate.

He wishes he wasn’t married to my mother. And technically too old for me.

“Me too,” I murmur woefully onto his sweet lips.

I can feel my body shutting down as Tauren pulls me closer, holding the back of my head in his palm, our bodies tangling beneath the comforter.

We’ll get a few hours of rest, but then I think we both need to talk to Colson. To apologize and tell him it’s okay. He might be a misfit, but he’s *our* misfit.

Fucked-up comes with the territory.

After all, beneath the disguise, even *Batman* is just Bruce Wayne.

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TAUREN



When in doubt, cook breakfast.

That’s something I learned from my aunt. Whenever we were going through a hard time, struggling financially, the worries of the world in the form of bill collectors knocking on our door, she would give me an easy smile and ask, “Pancakes, or French toast?”

I think the *more than complicated* situation I find myself in right now calls for bacon, eggs, and two different kinds of pancakes. I’m going with blueberry and chocolate chip.

Hashtag why choose, right?

At this point, it’s less breakfast and more brunch, since it’s almost one in the afternoon. But honestly, I’m feeling ravenously hungry after all the activities this weekend. Turns out releasing your inner Dom really works up quite the appetite. *Who knew?*

Pouring the last of the batter onto the griddle pan, I can’t help but bite my lip. Last night with Cyrus was… Well, there’s no other way to describe it. It was fucking magical.

My main worry when I found out the twin I’d been canoodling with for the past couple of days was not the one I’d thought was that maybe I’d been imagining the chemistry between Cyrus and me. Cyrus and I have a bond. Regardless of whether or not it’s wrong—I’m sure on some level it definitely is—I can’t help it.

And maybe I only noticed the lustful nature of it recently, which is a good thing because it makes me less of a creep. But when *he*—actually

Colson—began flirting with me, it flipped everything upside down in the best possible way.

To find out it wasn't even him, Cyrus, but actually his brooding twin brother who I've always thought hated me… That was a big ol' mind-fuck.

Because as pissed as I was last night—I'm aware I'll have to answer for my actions on that—the most alarming thing was thinking back to how amazing it was, that first night. The head in my office… It changed my entire world. It brought the real me forth, risen from the depths of my deep-seated denial.

There I was, blissfully thinking it was Cyrus who'd done that for me, because it made sense that it would be him; the twin I've always felt a deeper connection to. But it wasn't. It was the other one. *So what the hell does that mean?*

What we did in the pool house came to me as easy as breathing. He knelt for me, for fuck's sake. *Colson.* The one who throws his middle finger at *the man* on a daily basis. Even before that, he gave himself up to me the night I fucked him thinking he was Cyrus. Like it was exactly *everything* we both needed.

Last night when I found out he'd been lying, pretending to be his brother, my first thought was he did it to fuck with me. That the entire thing was all fake; all the feelings and the chemistry were fabricated just to mess with me. And maybe it started out that way. But I was there in that bed… In my office.

Colson fell into what we were doing as effortlessly as I did. He needed me to do the things I did to him in the pool house as badly as I needed to do them. Which means… apparently, I'm connected to him, too.

This whole thing feels like I'm tripping on acid. Two identical guys, willfully accepting the lusts I've kept locked away for decades, and I can't tell which is which. It's confusing and fucked up. And mesmerizing as hell.

When Cyrus came to me last night, *God*, it was exactly what I needed. It felt just as good with him as it did with Colson. A relief, but also not. Because now I seem to have feelings for both of them, and that's a massive problem, since I'm not supposed to have feelings for *either*.

Rubbing my eyes with my fingers, I try brushing it off for now, flipping the pancakes. I woke up this morning in my own bed, but instead of my female wife lying next to me, it was her very *not* female teenage son.

I won’t lie, I had a mini panic attack for a second. My entire life flashed before my eyes, and I imagined the police kicking down the door and shooting me in the face. Not sure why that would happen. And actually, I’d probably rather be shot than go to jail for statutory rape.

Anyway, once the gut-gripping nightmare sensation passed, I just couldn’t stop the smile that curled at my lips as I watched Cyrus sleep. He looked so peaceful, so undeniably *beautiful*, eyelids flickering, pink lips parted just enough for me to see the tips of his straight, white teeth; creamy pale complexion carved into lines of masculinity, lying there waiting for my fingers to explore.

I want so much from the kid already, it’s worrying. I don’t want to scare him… But I *do* want to tie him up in a secluded room and hurt him so good he survives off the orgasms I bite into him. And the wildest part is that he seems to want it, too.

It’s a confusing way to feel about your wife’s son… Who’s also in love with his brother.

And then there’s Colson. The jagged third of our forbidden puzzle.

As much as I didn’t want to, I left Cyrus in bed to come downstairs and make the breakfast, hoping cooking would help me clear my head and gain some perspective.

I need to speak to Colson… Apologize for almost killing him last night, and find out where his head is at. I need to speak to Cyrus, and lean on him for advice. I need to fix this place up and make sure there are no traces of gay sex anywhere in the house.

And I need to do all of this before my wife gets home.

What’s life without a challenge, right?

Ignoring the stresses piling up inside me that will all inevitably need to be dealt with, I arrange platters of pancakes on the kitchen island beside a big bowl of scrambled eggs and an even bigger plate of bacon. Everything is all set up; syrup, assorted juices, even some fresh fruit. And just as I’m blowing a strand of hair off my forehead, movement at the entrance to the kitchen catches my attention.

Glancing up, I take my time trying to figure out which twin is standing there. His hair is sort of tousled about, but that doesn’t automatically mean Colson, since Cyrus’s hair was definitely run-through by my fingers this morning. And he’s wearing a black hoodie, so I can’t find any visible ink…

But the fact that he hasn't smiled yet probably means it's Colson. That and he isn't timidly shifting from foot to foot or biting his lip.

"Good morning… I mean, *afternoon*," I mumble, the uncertainty I'm feeling driving me goddamn crazy.

These boys have really managed to twist me up.

He simply cocks his head like a curious animal, and I decide to put myself out of my own misery, stepping up to him slowly. There's a flicker of nervousness in his green eyes, which I used to view as a Cyrus thing. But after the past few days, I realize it's not.

I had assumed Colson was only acting that way to imitate Cyrus… But I'm not so sure about that anymore either.

Grasping his right hand gently in mine, I hear a small gasp from his lips as I lift the sleeve of his hoodie just enough to reveal black ink on his wrist in the shape of a hand holding a flame.

Colson. My eyes glide up to his face, not missing the sight of his Adam's apple dipping in his throat on the way there. I try to let go of his hand, but he slides his fingers through mine. Such a small, simple touch… And my blood is on fire.

My breathing shallows, and all I can see when I look at him are memories of his face, lust drunk; the shimmer in his teal eyes as I wielded my control over his body.

"Colson." I croak his name and then clear my throat, breaking our eye contact because it's just too confusing. "I'm sorry… About last night."

"You mean for trying to kill me?" he murmurs, not as snarky as he usually sounds. But still, the attitude is there.

And when my eyes dart back up to his and I raise my brow at his sarcastic tone, a small smirk tugs at his pink lips.

It looks so damn good. I can't help but grin myself. "I wouldn't have *killed* you…"

"Right," he murmurs, teasingly. "Keep telling yourself that."

Crowding him until he backs into the wall, I press my palms on either side of his waist, caging him in. "I'm trying to apologize, wise ass."

He bites the grin off his lips and nods. "Okay, sure. Apology accepted for trying to drown me."

"You deserved it," I hum, unable to stop watching his mouth, and how good it looks when he looks *happy*. Like last night in the pool house… when he smiled at me and let those little chuckles out.

It got me high.

Colson's glee dissolves fast into regret as he looks down. "I said I was sorry…"

"I know." Taking his chin in my fingers, I force his eyes back to mine. "And I accept your apology, too."

He blinks. "You do?"

"Yes." I nod. "But I want to know *why* you did it. I think I deserve that much… And so does your brother."

Colson fidgets before me, rolling his eyes petulantly. "Can't I just have some pancakes? Why do we have to, like… talk?"

I can't help the soft laugh that breaks. "You can have pancakes after we talk."

"You're way bossier now," he scoffs through an obviously forced frown. "I think I made a horrible mistake… helping your control-freak side out of the closet. Pun intended."

A full laugh bursts from within my throat, once more, against my will. The kid is… funny. *And cute.*

But then, now that I'm thinking about it, I've always found Colson funny, in his own scowling teenager kind of way. *So why does it feel like I'm only just getting to know him?*

"I want you to be honest with me, Colson," I tell him firmly. He rolls his eyes again, but I squeeze onto his hand until he peeks up at me. I lift it and place his palm flat over my heart. "Truth time, bad twin." His eyes are wide, but he nods hesitantly. "Have I made you feel like you're not a part of this family? Or like you… don't belong here with me and Cyrus?"

I feel the tension emanating from him, discomfort causing him to wiggle around in place and chew on his lower lip. So it's not a Cyrus thing... Or maybe it's just me.

His brows zip together as he scowls at the floor between us. "Don't give yourself that much credit."

"Colson," I scold.

His lashes flutter up at my face, and he whispers, "It wasn't *all* you…"

"You mean Cyrus made you feel that way, too?" I ask, my chest tightening in uneasy regret.

"Not really…" he mumbles. "I mean, maybe I made *myself* feel that way." His voice gets quieter as he confesses his truth. "I don't always feel… good."

He pauses, face contorted to show how painful it is for him to talk about this stuff. Raising my hand, I brush his jet-black hair back with my fingers, comforting him enough to hopefully let him know he can confide in me. His eyes close and he leans into my touch.

“I’m not always happy,” he sighs. “And I know nobody is. Life isn’t rainbows and sunshine, I get that. But when I’m not happy, it’s kind of… all I can think about. It takes over my head. And sometimes my thoughts pile up and pile up until I’m so heavy I don’t even want to stay standing anymore.”

My heart is bleeding for the kid. I have never wanted to reach inside my chest, pull out my heart and give it to someone as much as I do right here, right now.

Colson’s eyes are shiny as they lock on mine. “When I feel like that… it’s impossible not to look at you guys and feel left out. Angry or… jealous.” He shakes his head. “So it’s not your fault. It’s mine. *I’m* broken.”

“Colson, you are *not* broken,” I tell him gently, running my hands up to rub his shoulders.

My fingers lace at the nape of his neck as I hold him tight, and still. It seems to give him comfort, and I love it; how much peace I can seemingly impart to him with my touch and my control. *I think this is what I’ve been searching for my whole life…*

“You’re *you*,” I go on. “Everyone has their issues. And there are ways for you to feel better.”

His chin wobbles as he nods. “I’m already on medication…”

A surge of protectiveness winds through my chest.

“Well, clearly it isn’t working.” I brush his jaw with my thumbs. “And I’m going to have a word with that fucking dipshit doctor.”

He grins, and it’s the most beautiful thing, lighting up the whole room. “He does kind of suck… He spends almost every session convincing me that the way I feel is wrong.”

My gaze narrows, and my eye twitches. “Is that fucking right?”

Colson laughs. “Calm down, you’re looking like you want to drown *him* now.”

I can’t fight the twist of my lips. “I will if I need to.” He huffs and I run my thumb along his lower lip. “The point is that I don’t want you pretending to be anyone else, Colson. You’re perfect the way you are.”

The humor leaves his face, replaced by pure overwhelming emotion. He looks so skeptical of what I'm saying, but also *desperate* to believe it.

"It… it felt good with you," he whispers on a barely audible breath. My dick twitches hard in my pants. "Every time. I wanted it each time… Because you made me happy."

My eyes fall closed as my lips hover over his. "Is that right?" I feel him nod. "So you weren't just trying to get back at me?" A smirk forms on my mouth as it ghosts over his.

"Maybe a little bit." His grin brushes mine. "But that doesn't mean I wasn't desperate to feel you inside me."

A growl leaves my lips as they melt onto his, kissing him soft and slow, sucking at his mouth with my own. His greedy hands slip down from my back into my sweatpants, fingertips digging into the flesh of my ass while I lick his tongue and bite his plush lips.

"You're fucking infuriating." I press my hips into his, grinding him into the wall.

"I think you like it." He shivers.

We're so busy mauling each other, I seem to have completely forgotten we're out in the open. Which clicks back into my mind when I hear a little chuckle that morphs into an intrigued hum. I jump and pull myself off Colson, our flushed guilty faces turning to find Cyrus smirking at the entrance to the kitchen with his arms folded over his chest.

"Good thing no one else is here." He raises a brow.

Clearing my throat, I step over to him, taking his hand in mine. "We were just making up."

His smile goes a million degrees of gorgeous, eyes flitting between me and his brother. "I see that."

Colson rubs his lips, giving Cyrus one of his grumpy scowls, though it looks nowhere near as intimidating as usual with his cheeks all pink and his eyes glassy with lust.

I pull Cyrus into me, curling my arms around his waist and kissing his neck. I just have to suck in some of his delicious scent, which believe it or not is different from Colson's. It's not a huge difference, but now that I've been with them both, together and separately, I'm picking up on a few very minor distinctions that seem monumental to me, and to these feelings I seem to have for them both, as *individuals*.

It's so fucking strange, but I can't curb the thrill it gives me.

When my eyes meet Colson's, he's regarding Cyrus and me with a peculiar look. Still that intense glare going on, the possessiveness he holds for Cyrus, and maybe some newfound jealousy for me, too. But it's also mixed with what looks like curiosity. He seems as interested in us together as he is in himself with either of us.

This is all so bizarre, but it's terrifyingly magnificent all the same, like free falling off a cliff into the clear blue waters below. It's adrenaline I'm craving for the three of us… A deeply woven yearning for *more* of this scary, beautiful, confusing thing.

Releasing Cyrus, he sidles up to his brother and, with their identical eyes locked the whole time, sort of collapses into Colson. His arms go around Colson's waist, head resting on his shoulder, and Colson slides his hands up Cyrus's arms, a treasuring touch I can practically feel myself.

"You feeling okay, B?" Cyrus whispers to his twin.

Colson nods with his cheek resting on Cyrus's head, his eyes finding mine as he murmurs, "Yea, G. I'm doing much better, actually."

My brow lifts at the nicknames, but mainly, I can't ignore the warmth I'm feeling. The ultimate untamed pleasure I seem to get from seeing the two of them happy. It's unlike anything I could have ever expected.

I've been wanting to help these boys since the first day I met them. And I always thought it was something I could do by being their stepfather, or their friend.

Could it be more complex than that? Am I meant to help them on a deeper level?

It seems so fucking wrong… Because they're young, and the children of my wife.

But they're fucking smart kids. Not kids, *men*. I don't exactly care that they're a couple of weeks from technically being adults. *What is that based on, anyway? Just because the legal age in California is eighteen… So what? When you turn eighteen, you snap your fingers and you're suddenly an adult??*

It makes no sense. I've always felt like being *grown-up* is a state of mind. I grew up without parents, and it forced me to mature faster than other kids my age. I think the same could be said for Cyrus and Colson. The things they've been through have shaped them, and turned them into strong-willed, intelligent men. I'd like to experiment with it more… I want to know them, as genuinely as possible.

Shaking it all away, I zone back in on Cyrus and Colson, watching them comfort each other without words. I suppose words are unnecessary when your hearts are tethered together.

“Are you hungry?” I ask both of them.

At exactly the same time, they look up at me, then glance at the array of food on the marble island and mumble, in unison, “Definitely.”

I can’t help but blink at them, just processing this spot I find myself in. Even with all those staggering differences they have, they’re still basically carbon copies of one another. Save for maybe one or two physical obscurities. I’m sort of desperate to explore every inch of the two of them and find as many intricate little details as I can.

Clearing my throat once more, I gesture to the island. “Dig in. I made enough to feed an army.”

“I think I could eat enough to feed an army,” Colson mumbles, wasting no time grabbing a plate and shoveling eggs onto it.

“Just make sure you save me a blueberry pancake. Or three.” Cyrus chuckles, going for a plate himself. He begins stacking them and peeks at me, showing me a smile sweeter than the syrup he’s pouring. “I had fun last night.”

He tugs his lower lip between his teeth for just a moment. Long enough for my dick to jerk between my legs, remembering the same stuff I can see reflected back in his gem-like eyes; all his smooth skin and hard lines beneath me, accepting every inch of *animal* I had to give him.

“What did you kids get up to last night?” Colson asks, peeking at Cyrus in between picking up piece after piece of bacon, piling them on the giant mountain of food on his plate.

A rumbling laugh comes out of me, and he smirks like he’s pleased with himself.

“Something similar to what *you* kids got up to… in my bed,” Cyrus retorts.

Colson rolls his eyes. But then he peers at me and bites his lip, as if he’s remembering that night in detail…

This is a trip, man.

“Well, I’m glad you guys made up,” Cyrus sighs, the brightness in his eyes and a permanent pleasant twist to his lips giving away his stellar mood.

If I were making guesses, I'd say Cyrus is in seventh heaven, having me *and* Colson at his disposal. The kid has never seemed as confident and buoyant as he does right now.

"Me too," I tell him, shooting Colson a quick wink.

"I guess maybe my plan did work, then." Colson grins to himself while drizzling syrup all over everything on his plate. "Maybe you should be thanking me…"

"If you wanted to bring the three of us together, there are less devious ways of doing it." I admonish him with my eyes.

He quirks a brow at me. "Are there, though?"

Another laugh slips out. *What is this now?? This… comfort? This fuzzy zeal that feels like it's strangling my heart to death with joy…*

"All I'm saying is that video was hot as fuck," Cyrus adds dreamily, picking up a strip of bacon. "It was like watching a movie of myself getting nailed."

He licks his lip while Colson snatches the bacon from between his fingers and takes a bite.

My forehead lines as I watch them, suddenly puzzled by Cyrus's words.

"Video?" I ask, bemused.

They both freeze. Then they share a look, eyes locked in identically wide, guilt-ridden expressions.

Colson appears more remorseful than his brother, and when he finally turns his face to me, his lips are parted like he's about to explain something that will make me angry.

But before any of us can speak, the sound of the front door opening and slamming shut startles us.

"Mom's home!" Carla's voice shrills from the foyer.

I feel my eyes bulge out of their sockets like a cartoon character. My heart falls down into my gut as I gaze helplessly at the boys, who are staring at me with just as much disturbed concern.

We're all frozen in time, suspended in the mere seconds before everything changes. I can see it on their faces… They wish we could pause time for real. Give us even just a few more minutes of teasing and eating pancakes together before we have to jump back into reality.

I'm not ready for this…

But unfortunately, whether we're ready or not, it's time.

My wife is home.

Their mother is home.

Now what?

Carla comes traipsing into the kitchen, and now my heart is leaping up into my throat. I feel like I've never looked guiltier of anything in my entire life, even though realistically, we're not doing anything wrong. We're all fully dressed, and we're not touching. We're just having breakfast. Or *brunch*.

But my mind is in panic mode, jumbling through everything I didn't have a chance to do yet, because I was too busy cooking and reveling in my newfound forbidden happiness. Like sweep our bedroom, and the rest of the house, for any signs of what went down this weekend.

"How is everyone?" Carla chirps, going to the fridge and grabbing a juice. "You miss me?"

The three of us are still in slow motion, stiff and unable to move in any real way other than blinking. I can read the immense discomfort on the faces of the boys, and it's only serving to stress me out further.

Gulping it down as best I can, I force a smile for my wife, struggling to nod like a normal human being. "Of course." I clear my throat, trying my hardest to sound like myself. My *old* self… *Pre-sexual-awakening.* "You're home early…"

I wince at my words. I sound *so fucking guilty*.

Carla sips her juice. "No, I'm not. It's Sunday afternoon."

Her gaze narrows at me for a split second. It's over in a flash, but it's more than enough time for me to really start freaking the fuck out inside. I have to hold my breath to stop myself from shaking.

Carla looks over all the food on the breakfast bar and scoffs. "Jesus. Carbs and trans fats much?!" She lets out a condescending laugh before tugging her phone out of her coat pocket.

I don't miss Colson rolling his eyes when she isn't looking.

"So, boys… how was your weekend?" she asks, though it doesn't seem like she's paying attention, which is pretty standard. Before either of them can answer, she goes on. "Let me guess, Colson just got home and showered the scent of booze, weed, and Claudia's daughter off himself. And Cy, you better have finished your valedictorian speech."

The two of them share a quick look before Cyrus's eyes fall to the floor, his shoulders slumping as Colson's jaw ticks in visible rage.

I've seen it before, but now, after everything that's happened, especially knowing how much these boys have suffered at the hands of their negligent upbringing, this shit spurs on a wave of nausea.

I'm sick to my stomach, for a myriad of reasons.

Carla wanders over to me, giving me a sweet smile, or as much of a smile as her Botox and chemical peel will allow. "And then, of course, there's you, dear. Just trying to hold it all together."

I can't help the heaviest swallow ever as I stare back at her, jittering inside while doing my best to seem normal.

I kiss her gently on the cheek. "Glad you're home. We missed you."

She gives me one of her smug, patronizing twists of the mouth, as if she doesn't particularly believe me, but she also doesn't exactly care. Then she jaunts out of the room, calling over her shoulder, "Tauren, bring my bags upstairs please!"

My teeth are clenching together so hard they're about to crack and crumble.

Glancing at the boys, the despondent looks on their gorgeous faces are making me feel purely awful. I wanted to talk to them before Carla came home… To maybe gauge their headspaces. Because, let's be real, *everything* is different now, and I'm not sure how to go on from here.

My lips part as I watch them and they stare back at me, like they're waiting for me to say something. I know I should, but I just can't seem to find the right words.

"Tauren!" Carla shouts again and I flinch.

Shaking my head, I turn away from my stepsons, feeling like a failure of epic proportions. But I need to focus. I can talk to them later. Right now, I need to get on the offensive and tend to my wife.

Stalking into the foyer, I grab Carla's bags and haul them upstairs. Inside our bedroom, I drop them fast and dart around. Carla isn't in here just yet, but she's probably coming up any minute. I need to make sure this place is wiped clean.

However, now that I'm looking around the bedroom, I think I was freaking out for nothing. It's spotless in here. The bed is already made with new sheets, everything in the bathroom is the way I would have left it… Even the tie from Carla's bathrobe I used on Cyrus last night is back where I'd found it.

I let out a long breath of relief. *Cyrus did this… He cleaned everything up.*

My heart swells at the thought. Not that I want him to have to worry about such things, and I feel like a real scumbag for putting him in this position, but he didn't even hesitate.

Staring off into space for a moment, I consider a scenario.

The last thing I want is to be sneaking around with them while I'm still married to their mother. It honestly sounds like Hell on Earth. But I need to do *something*… Because I'm not sure I can go on without them.

It's amazing how being with them for only a couple of days has shed such a blinding light on the denial I've been in. It's like all the things I've avoided for the last year have been shoved into the forefront of my mind as one hundred percent stone-cold truths.

I'm not in love with Carla. I never have been.

She's a bad person who married me for my money.

And I let her, which means I must be pretty pathetic.

And then, of course, the most terrifying of all these facts…

I've always been more invested in Cyrus and Colson than their mother.

Gradually and uncontrollably, my hands come up to my face, and I rub my eyes. *What am I supposed to do now??*

The sound of footsteps in the hall sends an awareness rushing through me. I hope like hell it's Cyrus or Colson… or both. But it ends up just being Carla. She storms into the room and saunters past me without a word, slinking into our bathroom and closing the door.

A helpless sigh rushes out of me.

If I thought I was lost before… now I'm really fucking wandering aimlessly.



THERE'S AN ITCH INSIDE ME. A persistent pang of vexation I can't shake.

I'm uncomfortable in my own home, and it's really unfortunate.

I hate this.

I haven’t been able to speak to the boys yet, which is twisting me up in the gut. I asked Carla if she wanted to have dinner together as a family, more as a ploy to seem normal than anything else. And of course, she said, *sure*, then never showed up when the food got here. I was in no mood to sit at the table with the boys and act like things were the same as before, so I texted them that dinner was in the kitchen, then hid out in my office for an hour.

This is exactly what I *didn’t* want to happen. I didn’t want it to seem like I’m slipping back into my regular routine, pretending this past weekend never happened. I know denial has been something I’ve worn like a second skin up until now, but after freeing my true self from his chains, I refuse to lock him back up.

Still, despite that realization, I’m no clearer on what my next move should be.

Even if I were to leave Carla, it’s not like I could ever be with Cyrus, or Colson… or both of them. *And I mean… is that really something I’d want?? A relationship with two teenagers?*

I’m so confused, I could retch.

I’ve been trying to nurse my second scotch, because I don’t want to get drunk, but it’s hard when the state of my existence is so goddamn gray. Staggering over to my pool table, I run my fingers along the green felt, remembering the lines we crossed right here only yesterday.

I’m not sure why discovering that Cyrus and Colson fool around together doesn’t shock or weird me out. Maybe that says something about me, but… I don’t know, I can just *feel* it. The extra stuff between the two of them. It flows, like rushing water.

Sure, they’re twin brothers and that connection is as clear as the sky on a summer day. But then there’s this other aspect of the two of them that just feels like more. I suppose it’s *wrong*, fucked up, and I should want to condemn them for it, but I don’t. In fact, I think I see how perfect they are for each other. And if that makes me a disgusting freak, well then… so be it.

All the wrong I’ve done over the past few days, you’d think I’m having some kind of manic episode. But on the contrary…

This is me. The *real* Tauren Vance. And no, it’s not pretty. But it’s genuine and decorated in every mar of abhorrent mess I hold.

Just like Cyrus and Colson, it must be in my genes, those exquisite defections.

I am my father's son.…

I could be a sociopath. Or I could have *too much* empathy. Too much love to give simply to a person society deems as *right*.

Or even to just *one* of them.

Finishing my drink, I place the glass down on the edge of the pool table and finally leave my office. My body, my heart, and the fizzling sensations in my limbs urge me to go upstairs… To go find my boys.

But instead, I go outside.

Noticing that the backdoor is open, I step outside into the calm air of this late spring evening. The first thing I spot is the ocean, spread out beneath the sparse sprinkles of stars in the clear night's sky.

The second thing is my wife.

She's sitting in of the chairs by the bar, wineglass in hand. But rather than looking out onto the ocean like I've done so many nights out here, she's watching the pool house. Staring at it, really. As if she expects someone to come waltzing out.

Brows zipping in confusion, I take a seat in the chair next to her. We sit in silence for a few minutes, featherlight and somehow burdened at once. There's a strange ease between Carla and me, there always has been. I used to mistake it for comfort, which gave me the placating I needed to marry her.

We're content together, I'd tell myself.

But really, it's the sort of blank nothingness that comes from two people being so fully separate they're almost like complete strangers. Thinking about it now, it blows me away that I was able to ignore all this stuff for a full year.

But then it was part of the plan… The image of myself I'd spent my entire life up until the last few days concocting. Like creating an algorithm, I'd always thought of love logically. Turns out, it's not. It's fully emotional. The part of the universe that can't be explained or rationalized.

It shows up exactly when it wants to, with no concern for expectancy.

My relationship with Carla was never more than a way for me to ignore my biology. To stuff down my unconscious desires and ride the waves of conformity. But awakening to it now… I've been sucked under. It's one of those things that you can ignore forever…

Until you can't.

In this moment, more than anything in the world, I want a fucking divorce. I even take a breath and open my mouth, readying the words on my tongue.

But once again, Carla beats me to the punch.

"Remember when I asked you to set up the home security to your computer, but you told me you were *too busy* with work?" She takes a sip from her glass while I stare at the side of her face.

Is she really coming down on me for this dumb shit right now?? I mean, here I am, wanting to talk about divorce, and she's bringing up something she'd been nagging me about three months ago.

I roll my eyes to myself and recline in my seat. "I suppose so…"

"Well, you never did it," she says in this smug tone of self-satisfaction.

"Is there a point to this conversation?" I can't keep the annoyance out of my voice.

Carla turns a bit in her seat to face me. "Actually, there is. Because you never set up the systems properly, I'm still getting all these nonsensical alerts to my phone. Every time the doorbell rings, or someone opens the front door. The back door, too." She pauses for a moment, and I squint at her. "Hell, really any time someone *moves* out here, I get an alert." She leans forward in her chair. "The cameras… all that live streaming bullshit. It comes right to my phone."

Her eyes are locked on mine in a way that's making me suddenly nauseous. I find myself swallowing over and over as if I'm about to puke.

Her head tilts right. And she stares at me.

My pulse speeds up excessively.

My stomach turns violently.

And we both just keep staring.

What she's saying makes sense. Our security systems are elaborate. And now that I'm thinking about it, I *was* supposed to fix it so that the live feed from the cameras went to my laptop rather than her account on her phone, mainly because she's never given a shit about the security.

It was supposed to be my thing. But I brushed it off.

And now she's staring at me like she's seen *so much*.

Trying my hardest to remain calm, I hold her gaze while attempting to disguise my terrified trembles. Inside, I'm panicking.

My entire life is flashing before my eyes.

She knows. She fucking knows.

She saw everything.

I'm going to fucking jail.

It's not really an exaggeration. Carla is a spiteful woman. I've seen it before with acquaintances of hers, or even her ex-husband. She's purposely prevented him from having any contact with Cyrus and Colson simply because she's vindictive. She never even gave them the option to speak with him from prison.

So if she did, in fact, see the things that happened out here last night… She'll make me suffer. Dearly.

"What do you want to say, Carla?" I keep my tone as calm as I can manage. "Tell me what you want."

A sly grin forms on her injected lips. "You really are a sick puppy, aren't you, Tauren? I mean, all it took was one weekend alone for you to fuck both of my underage sons. Unless… has it been going on this whole time? Have you been fucking my children the entire time we've been married… and you only just slipped up??"

I'm dizzy.

I'm so goddamn lightheaded right now, I think I might pass out. But I need to keep my wits about me. I can't admit to anything…

There has to be a way out. Even if she saw the footage, maybe I can find some way to delete it, or…

Wait. She said *both…*

The only thing she would have seen on the cameras is me and Colson. Him kneeling and then us going into the pool house.

Then us coming out naked and fighting about an hour later.

Oh God, oh Jesus… I am so fucking fucked.

My life is over.

Forcing myself to calm down, I stammer, "I don't know what you're…" My words get lodged in my throat. "Talking about."

She chuckles. "Right. Okay, I'll play. Let's pretend I didn't see you bringing Colson into the pool house last night. Frankly, I'd expect this kind of perverse behavior from him, anyway. But after I saw that, I freaked out—naturally—and logged into his iCloud account." She pauses for a moment, watching in obvious morbid glee while shivers rack my body. "I don't trust him for shit, so sometimes I check up on him. Anyway, I found a video he'd recorded… Of you and Cyrus."

Spots dance in my vision. I feel the blood drain from my face as I gawk at her in absolute shock and terror.

A video.

This morning, Cyrus mentioned a video.

That video was hot as fuck, he said.

My mind is spinning, spiraling, whirling around and around like I'm on a demonic carnival ride that just keeps speeding up.

Colson must have recorded us, when he was pretending to be Cyrus.

To get back at me.

My eyes fall shut for a moment. And I know it's crazy, but the strangest wave of serenity washes over me.

I'm going to lose it all. Everything I've worked so hard for my whole life. My job, my house, this family I thought I wanted.

I was finally the *hero*… The savior of the story.

And now it's all gone. But for some unknown reason, it's freeing.

This is me. *This* is the real Tauren Vance.

I'm not the good guy. I'm the villain. Just like my father.

Fallen not only on one sword… But two.

"You fucked up, Tauren," Carla murmurs, her voice echoing in my head, bouncing off every interior surface of my skull.

"I… I didn't…" My voice gives out. I have nothing more to say.

My words are all dried up.

"Oh, yes you did." She takes another sip of her wine, then smashes the glass on the ground by my feet. I barely flinch. "You've made a fucking fool of me, Tauren Vance. And now I'm going to take *everything* from you. You think you can just fuck my kids and walk away scot free?? Think again. We're going to make this as beneficial for me, and as painful for *you* as humanly possible."

My throat is sandpaper as I try to swallow, nearly choking on how absolutely fucked I am.

"Screwing Colson is one thing. He's a walking disaster. But you took advantage of my *good* son. The one who was supposed to carry me when this bullshit marriage eventually fizzled out."

My forehead lines in disbelief. The migraine pounding at my temples is making it so I can barely see her anymore, but I'm still straight-up *enraged* at what she's saying about the boys.

“Colson is not a disaster,” I mumble, blinking hard and rubbing my eyes with my thumbs. “Cyrus isn’t your meal ticket.”

She lets out a laugh of incredulity. “God, how did I not see how much of a sick, perverted fuck you are from the start? You were always too invested in those kids.”

“Carla, they’re men. Let’s not jump the gun here,” I growl, my neck stiffening in rage. “Yes, I fucked up. And yes, I’ll give you whatever you want, but please… Just leave them out of it.”

This time her laugh is even louder, and much more maniacal. “That’s rich coming from you! You *ruined* them, Tauren. Their lives are gonna be all kinds of fucked up now.”

My head shakes over and over. “Carla, they didn’t do anything wrong. If you want me to take the blame, I will, but please… Let them be.”

“You’re unbelievable.” Her head cocks. “Here’s how this is going to go, Tauren. You will fall in line. You’ll take full responsibility and make sure I get everything I want. If you so much as make waves during this process, I’ll hang you out to dry. *Everyone* will find out just how much of a twisted loser you really are.”

Her words sting, of course they do. But more than anything, I’m quaking down to my core at the thought that she could do anything to hurt those boys. If word gets out about what happened between us, it could seriously affect their reputation. They’re so close to graduating. Plus, UCLA…

If what I did derails their lives in any way, I’ll never forgive myself.

I can’t stop picturing all the things I have floating away from me. My company, my friends, my house, this life… But mostly, those boys. What they’ve done for me.

It’s all going up in smoke.

So I nod, slowly, accepting my fate. I fucked up royally. I *did* ruin everything. But I just need to make sure I don’t ruin them, too. It’s the only thing I care about.

“Fine.” My voice is hoarse with pent-up emotion. “Whatever you want.” Standing up slowly on shaky legs, I mind the smashed glass by my feet. “I’m going to the Four Seasons. I’ll send for my things.”

Carla doesn’t look at me. She picks at her fingernail while I shiver in place. Glancing out at the ocean, I take in the view… One last time.

Sucking in a breath, I turn to leave. But my wife’s voice stops me.

“Tauren?”

“Yes?”

Her eyes meet mine, and *I swear to God*, she looks happy.

“If you ever even attempt to communicate with my sons again, I’ll make sure you end up in prison. For far longer than my first husband.”

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COLSON



Inevitable disaster.

Those are the words that have been in the front of my brain for hours. I don’t know, it could just be that I’m crazy nervous since Mom came home, literal *moments* after I had been kissing her husband.

Or it could be what happened *before* those kisses… What led up to them.

These new feelings I’ve been developing for Tauren are inconvenient, yes. But I can’t deny that my body feels lighter when he’s around; my head not so stuffy.

It’s like I get these weird, deranged butterflies in my stomach when I think about him now… I know they’re psycho because they just won’t stop fluttering about, regardless of how little sense it makes.

I went into this weekend planning to entrap Tauren, then humiliate him with the truth that he’d been seduced by the wrong twin. Turns out, I wasn’t *wrong* at all.

I was the right twin… But so is Cyrus.

Tauren and my brother got busy last night. That much was obvious from the thoroughly fucked look Cy had when he came downstairs. It gave me some serious pangs of jealousy in my gut at first. Until I remembered that I only recognize the look because *I’m* usually the one responsible for it.

And the stranger thing about it was that I wasn’t just jealous of Tauren for being with Cyrus. This time, I was also jealous of Cy for being with Tauren. I’m all switched up, like a remix. And what’s even more ludicrous is that I don’t think I *need* to be jealous, of anyone.

I think… I have Tauren, just like I have Cyrus.

But I'm not supposed to have either of them.

Some potent sativa is necessary at the moment. Otherwise, I might just go completely *cuckoo*.

I've always had the clawing urge to grab my brother and seal him to me, like we're meant to be *one*. To sew us up and make us complete. And I knew hooking up with him meant more than just helping him out and owning him in secret, whether or not I wanted to admit it to myself. I guess it took Tauren happening to get me there. Inserting myself into their equation changed a lot of my feelings.

I know my brother wants what he gets from Tauren and me, together. I saw it on his face in the kitchen earlier. Tauren is a father figure and a friend to Cyrus. And I'm… what makes him whole. To him it probably seems like the perfect trifecta. Unfortunately for my brother, our reality is a harsh bitch. And the chance of us all making some weird relationship happen is fatter than a prize-winning pig.

Digging my toes into the sand, I stare at the blanket of ocean before me. I came out here over an hour ago to walk and smoke. I've sort of felt like shit all day, and I'm hoping I'm coming down with a cold and not some useless feelings instead.

Tauren vanished when Mom got home, and I haven't seen him since. Cyrus and I came down for dinner after he texted us… but he was nowhere to be found. Cy asked if I wanted to sit and eat with him, but my appetite was long gone.

As peaceful a night as it is, cool breeze sweeping up from the sparkling deep Pacific, there's still this anxious twisting happening in my stomach that feels just awful. It reminds me of my brother, and his anxiety. And now it reminds me of Tauren… and what he said to me in the kitchen earlier.

You're perfect the way you are.

My heart leaps behind my ribs, and I roll my eyes at it. I can't believe I'm swooning for him the way I am…

And why? Just because he actually cares about me and my well-being? And he doesn't think I need to change, or be more like Cyrus.

And he ties me up and fucks me in a way that seems to settle every breath of turmoil in my lungs…?

Big whoop.

I’m being ridiculous, I know that, but I can’t help it. I’m overwhelmed as fuck right now, and my default way of dealing with it is to scoff and get fucked up. But even smoking this entire joint hasn’t stopped me from wanting to run back up into the house and find him. To tug him and Cyrus back into his office or somewhere else private and let them both be exactly what I *need*.

Tauren’s control, Cyrus’s submission.

It’s the best of both worlds.

But I can’t do that. My mother is home, and Tauren is missing in action, which could only mean he wants to forget everything we did together. *He wants to pretend this weekend never happened, right?*

I really hope not, for Cyrus’s sake more than mine, since Cy is head over heels for the guy, not me.

I’m not.

Wandering barefoot in the sand for a few more minutes, I consider what life will be like if we have to pretend none of it happened. If Tauren chooses to stay in the closet, and stay married to my mother—which, at this point, it’s beyond obvious he doesn’t want—it’ll make for some super awkward encounters around the house from now on.

Until we leave for college, that is. Or when *Cyrus* leaves for college and I… leave to do God knows what. I haven’t made that decision yet either and time is running out. Graduation is in like ten days.

But that’s a whole other thing.

There’s no way Tauren will be able to live the rest of his life ignoring his dominant desires. He’ll end up cheating on my mom again for sure. And the stupidest thing is that it doesn’t even matter. It’s not like they love each other. Mom loves his money. Tauren loves being the hero. They could both get those things without each other.

Mom could marry some other rich shmuck, maybe one who’s about to croak so she can inherit the money without having to deal with him. And Tauren, well…

He saved me and Cy, in a way that no one in the world would understand but us.

Maybe he could be our villainous hero. *Our dark knight.*

I can’t take it anymore. I need to go talk to him. I need him to know how I feel.

I'm not sure that I can manage a Rom-com confession or anything like that, but at the very least, I can tell him what I've been secretly dying to tell someone for a long time now.

I think I'm gay.

Biting the inside of my cheek, I wander back up to our house, my mind running wild as I wonder what Tauren will say when I tell him how much he's helped me.

I wonder if it will help him realize he doesn't need my bitch mother.

He's *my* hero.

I take the steps up to our backyard two at a time, glancing around when I reach the top. No one's out here. But when I walk past the pool onto the veranda, I notice smashed glass on the ground. *Weird.*

Striding inside through the backdoor, I'm on a mission to find Tauren or my brother. Or both. The downstairs is quiet as usual, but still, I check all the rooms. The living room, the study, the gym, they're all empty. But when I reach Tauren's office, the door is open a crack. Peering inside, I spot him over by his desk.

It looks like he's… *packing things into a bag?*

Confused, I enter the room slowly, though my feet want me to run to him. He pauses stuffing things into his bag when he notices me, though he doesn't look up.

"Hey…" I mumble stupidly, not knowing what else to say. He doesn't speak. "What are you doing…?"

Tauren sucks his lower lip, his fingers visibly shaking as he continues what he was doing, sliding folders into his laptop bag.

That yucky feeling from before? Yea, it's really just grossing me the fuck out now.

"Tauren, what's going on?" I mutter, more insistently. "Why are you packing? And why aren't you speaking?"

His eyes lift to mine, and they're wide, red-rimmed and nervous. They flick to the door and then back to me before he whispers, "Colson, please go."

My spine stiffens, my blinking becoming rapid. I'm so concerned, I can't even appreciate the fact that he knew it was me right away this time.

Something's *wrong*.

I step forward. "What?" He steps back.

“Please,” he mumbles, eyes darting to the doorway once more. “Go. *Quick*.”

My mouth is just hanging open. I have no clue what’s happening, and I’m about to tell him I’m not going anywhere when I hear a shrill voice behind me, “Oh, hell no. Don’t you dare speak to him!”

Spinning fast, I find my mother storming into the room, her face lined in a displeased grimace. She looks fucking pissed.

Stomping up to me fast, she grabs my arm, hard enough that I wince. She looks over my face for a moment, the way she does when she’s trying to figure out which one I am.

Yea, I wish I was kidding. My own mother can’t tell her sons apart, even after almost eighteen years on this planet together.

I must be scowling at her because she cocks her head and scoffs. “Colson, leave. Now.”

“What? No. What the fuck is going on??” I rip my arm out of her grasp. My eyes spring to a visibly distraught Tauren. I’ve never seen him like this before. “Why is Tauren packing?”

“Col, please just go upstairs.” Tauren speaks calmly, but I pick up on the subtle hitch in his voice. “Everything is—”

“Fucking speak to him again and I’m calling the police,” my mother snarls, then turns her withering glare on me. “This is all your fault, you know. I should’ve known… You’re disgusting.”

Her words strike me in the chest like a blade, the stinging pain throwing kerosene on the flames of my confused anger.

“*Do not* fucking speak to him like that,” Tauren barks, straightening and stepping up to my mother. “You’re getting what you want, Carla. I’m going. Leave him out of it.”

My heart falls out of my chest into a puddle of blood on the floor. “You’re *leaving*? What do you mean you’re leaving??”

“Colson, get the fuck out of here before I lose my goddamn mind!” Mom squawks in my ear. When she realizes I’m not moving, her head shakes at me, a pitying disgust in her eyes. “Your *Daddy* is leaving. For good. Does that upset you?” She glowers at me for a moment, but I can’t respond. I’m frozen. She rolls her eyes. “Nice job ruining everything. You’re like a *curse*… You might as well wear a sign that says, *Fuck at your own will*.”

“Carla!” Tauren roars. “Enough!”

I catch her flinch in fear, but I can barely even be concerned with their fighting. I'm too busy crumbling inside…

My mom… knows??

She somehow knows what happened, and Tauren is leaving. She kicked him out?

No no no no no no…

"No," I murmur, pressure building up in my head.

"Ugh, you're pathetic." She grabs me by the arm again and drags me out of Tauren's office, my feet skidding behind me.

She shoves me out the door, then slams it shut, blocking it so I can't try to get back in. My eyes are bugging, pulse thumping loud in my ears.

This isn't happening.

"I swear to God, Colson, I'm so close to calling the cops and letting them sort this out," she seethes in my face. "Get the fuck upstairs before I beat the shit out of you."

"He didn't do anything," I whimper, weakened and falling the hell apart.

She scoffs. "Save it. I saw everything."

My jaw clenches, tears pushing at my eye sockets. "Cyrus!" I yell out for my brother.

"Don't get him involved in this!" She shoots flames of hatred at me through her bloodshot eyes. "He's suffered enough at the hands of *you*."

"No. Fuck that." I ignore her, panicked adrenaline making me jittery. "You don't get to just kick Tauren out of his own house without hearing us out. Cyrus, come downstairs now! I need you!"

"I wish I could kick *your* ass out too," Mom spits in my face. "You've done nothing but ruin your brother for fucking years. And now you've ruined my marriage, too."

Everything hurts.

I want to fall to my knees, but I can't. I *refuse* to give her the satisfaction.

I go for the door to Tauren's office, but she blocks me. Reaching over her, I bang my fist against it. "Tauren! I'm sorry… Tauren, please don't hate me!"

"God, you're a waste of time." My mother chuckles, like the evil bitch she is.

Finally, Cyrus comes dashing over to me, but he stops when he sees Mom blocking Tauren's office door, pushing me away every time I try to knock or go for the handle.

"What the hell is going on??" Cyrus gasps.

"Go up to your rooms, both of you," Mom commands, though neither of us listen.

"Mom… what's happening?!" Cyrus's tone raises.

"She's kicking Tauren out," I tell him, breathless and hoarse. "She thinks she knows something… But she doesn't know shit."

When I look at Cyrus again, he's stiff, horror and devastation, all kinds of awful shit I hate seeing on his face.

"Save it, Colson. You're lucky I'm even letting you speak to your brother right now." She shoves me away from the door. "Now, go upstairs. Both of you. You will *never* be seeing or speaking to Tauren Vance ever again, do you understand me?"

"Fuck that," I growl, then spin and bang on the door one more time. "Tauren! Tauren, open the door!"

Suddenly, the door opens slowly, and Tauren's face, so fucking beautiful even when it's etched in misery, appears in front of me. But my mother wedges herself in between us.

"Guys, I'm leaving," he breathes out his words on a shaky exhale. "I'm… I'm sorry about what I did to you. About what I… made you do. It was wrong, and we won't be seeing each other ever again." The blue in his eyes sparkles with pleading remorse. It smashes through my chest like a sledgehammer to a plate of glass. He looks to my mother. "Carla, please. I'm going, okay?"

My mouth is open, but I don't know what to say, or what to do. I'm at a loss, frozen solid as Mom pushes me out of the way, and Tauren walks by us, bag in hand.

Helplessly, I turn to Cyrus who's chewing on his lower lip, in the aggressive way he does when he's either about to burst into tears or collapse.

Tauren wanders up the hall, grabbing another large bag.

No. No no no… this isn't happening.

This can't *happen.*

"Tauren, wait!" I gasp, rushing to him. Mom grabs me by the shirt, and I spin to face her. "He's lying. It wasn't him. He didn't do anything! It was

me. Blame me."

"Oh, trust me, I do," she mumbles.

Tauren's back is rigid, and it's like I can *feel* his devastation without even seeing his face. He doesn't speak a word, nor does he turn around.

He takes his bags and walks to the door.

And he fucking *leaves*.

Shoving my mother out of the way, I rush to the door. I go to whip it open, but she slams it shut in front of my face. When I turn, she slaps me, hard, right across the left cheek.

I clutch my stinging face, glaring at her like she's lost her goddamn mind. "Psycho bitch."

"Husband fucker," she growls.

"Mom! You can't hit your son like that." Cyrus rushes over to me. But she grabs his arm and pulls him away.

"Cyrus, enough! I don't want you speaking to him either," she shrieks so loud it echoes off the walls. "Go upstairs. Now!"

"You don't know what you're talking about," I hiss in her face, towering over her. She's nearly my height, but I still have a couple of inches on her. And I definitely have the unkempt wrath working in my favor. "You're a sad, old gold-digger. We all knew you'd find some excuse to kick Tauren to the curb, eventually."

She folds her arms over her chest. "Who knew the reason would be my worthless excuse for an offspring bending over for him?"

"Fuck you," I roar, with red splashing in my vision. "I didn't do shit. But if I wanted to fuck your husband, it would be *that easy*, wouldn't it? You can't even hold on to a man when the only other people around are your fucking *sons*."

"Ugh!" she bellows and slaps me again.

I want to hit her so fucking bad, but I know I can't. It'll just make things worse.

So instead, I roar out loud and whip around, punching the door over and over again.

"Colson, please," Cyrus's voice whimpers, but he sounds far away.

Everything feels so far… Lost in the warped bullshit of my life.

I'm spiraling. I don't even feel like I'm inside my own skin anymore.

I need to get the fuck out of here.

Using my throbbing hand, I whip the door open and dive through it before Mom can stop me. Stumbling down the front path, I find Tauren's car already gone from the driveway. Tears well behind my eyes, but I force them away, stomping into the garage. I barely even notice I have no shoes on.

Grabbing my spare key I keep hidden inside an empty paint can, I get into our Audi and start it up, peeling out of the driveway with a loud skid, kicking up dust as I go. I'm sure I shouldn't be driving right now, but I don't care. I need to get as far away from my awful bitch of a mother as possible.

Speeding up the street, I'm lost in a thick haze of furious regret. I can't even think straight. My mind is reeling through all the bullshit that just happened.

Mom knows…

What does she even know? And how??

She kicked Tauren out. He's… gone.

My heart aches inside the black socket of my chest when I remember the look of sorrow on his face. And his words…

He said it was his fault. He took the blame.

My head shakes on its own. *No. This isn't fucking right.*

He's not some pervert. I'm sure it looks that way to a dumbass on the outside like my mom, but it's definitely not the case. *I* came onto *him* for fuck's sake. And even if he wants it, it's not because we're young and he's preying on us. He's interested in me and Cyrus as people. As human beings. *Adults.* Because we are. At the end of the day, I don't care if my birthday isn't for a couple of weeks…

I'm a man, and no one will tell me otherwise.

Just because Tauren is older than us, it means we can't love him?? That's bullshit.

No one is innocent in this world. Everyone has their issues, but Tauren's heart is good. He cares about people. He cares about me…

I… I think I…

Sniffling, I wipe my eyes and shake my head.

After speeding around for about twenty minutes, I wind up at the abandoned house off the freeway. I know Charlie, Isla, and Paris are here, because they were texting me earlier that they were coming out. I had no real desire to hang out with them before.

Things were different a half-hour ago.

Now I just need to escape. I don't want to… But I *need* to get rid of this noise suffocating my brain. The scrambled thoughts of worry and self-hatred.

Hopping out of the car, I round the house to the backyard. It looks like Charlie started a fire in the trashcan we use for fires when it's dark. He's sitting on the edge of the empty in-ground pool, feet dangling, with one arm around Isla and the other around Paris. Paris lifts a bottle to his lips and gives him a drink. Then Isla holds a joint up to his lips for him to take a drag.

My brow cocks. *Alright, we see you, pimpin.*

Strolling over to where they're sitting, they don't even notice me until I plop down beside Paris.

"Heyyy! There he is!" Charlie slurs, showing me a lopsided grin. "We were waiting for you."

My face remains indifferent as Paris hands me the bottle of vodka. I take a sip, letting it burn down my throat before gulping even more. The girls cheer and giggle, and I wish I could say I'm *happy* to be hanging out with friends, but I'm not. I'm far from happy right now.

And I don't think these people are really my friends. I don't think I *even have* real friends.

No one knows me… No one but my brother and…

I take another swig from the bottle.

"Man, what happened to you yesterday??" Charlie chuckles lazily. "The party was raging! I thought you'd crash over like everyone else did. Or at least come back."

"I was busy," I grunt, tapping my finger repeatedly on the bottle while waiting anxiously for the alcohol to give me the buzz I need.

Paris leans in closer to me, brushing her pouty lips on my ear. "I missed you. I was hoping we could finish what we started the other night."

Her breasts are pressing into my arm, and it's clenching my stomach. *Like usual…*

I used to think this was just part of arousal. But now that I'm being a little more honest with myself, I know it happens to me because I'm uncomfortable.

Her smell is just so inherently *female*. There's nothing wrong with it. Smelling like an expensive French hooker is probably what a lot of guys

find attractive. But not me.

All I can think about is how I wish she smelled like Tauren. *Masculine*; like strength, and sweet aching dominance. When my eyes fall shut, I remember the scents that surrounded me when I was tied up and blindfolded. *Ocean breeze, sweat, rope, and Vaseline.*

My dick jumps in my pants.

Paris, the girl who has her tongue in my ear, hasn't the tiniest clue that I'm thinking about a guy right now. Or worse, my stepdad. And sure, I could make myself have sex with her. I've done it many times before; forced myself to have sex with a girl because I thought I was supposed to.

But I was never satisfied. Because apparently, what I really need is the push and pull I can only get from the wrong people.

And dick. I need dick.

It's liberating to even be admitting this to myself. I wish I could feel happier about it, but my brain is too cluttered with stress and worry; anger and sadness. So I take another gulp from the bottle, just trying to quiet it down a little.

"You bring your guitar?" Charlie asks me, and I shake my head. "Damn. Me neither. Well, turn on one of those sexy little playlists of yours!" His face tilts to Isla, zoning in on her mouth. "Let's *rage*."

She giggles as he kisses her. I'm kind of just staring at nothing while I move on autopilot, pulling my phone out of my pocket. Paris is really going ham on my ear, licking and sucking at it. It used to make me a little hard, but now all I've got is a wet noodle in my pants.

This past weekend ruined me. I can't even *pretend* anymore.

I want him… I only want them.

Clenching my jaw, I stuff it down and go for a playlist on my phone. There are two new texts from Cyrus… And I know I shouldn't read them, since I'm trying to forget about life right now. But I can't ignore him. Not if he needs me.

Cy: Are you alright?

Cy: Col, please… Just don't do anything crazy

Huffing, I swipe the texts away and go back to finding music. *He knows me so well.*

And I know him too, which means he's probably freaking the fuck out right now. Worrying himself into an early grave, about me, Tauren, everything. I should go home and be with him…

But my cunt of a mom probably won't even let me near him.

Anger bubbles inside me once more, and this time when I tip the bottle to my lips, I gulp three times in a row. The burn is so thick in my throat, I almost gag. But I force it down.

Force it all away.

Forget everything.

Numb yourself.

"Hey, don't bogart the vodka," Charlie mumbles. "Plus, I've got something better." My increasingly fuzzy face tips up at him as he pulls a vial out of his shirt pocket. "Made one of my famous Xannie-Addie cocktails. I call it Xadderall."

"Because Addanax was taken?" I giggle to myself, hiccupping while the girls laugh too hard at my stupid joke.

Charlie huffs and uncaps the vial, dumping powder onto his hand and snorting it. Then he holds it up, raising his brows at me. I thrust my hand in his direction immediately, because *yes please.* Give me whatever will make me forget.

Forget that I'm gay. Forget that I'm in love with the wrong people.

Forget that Tauren's life is ruined.

Forget that it's all my fault.

Charlie dumps a small mound of powder onto my hand, and I snort it fast. The bitter taste runs down the back of my throat and it's gross as hell, but it works in an instant. Their voices echo and warp into this strange humming sound, like I'm inside a synthesizer.

Blinking hard, I chuckle to myself and shake my head. Paris is whispering to me, but I can't hear her. I focus my blurry vision on my phone screen to look for some music. Something loud and angry I can scream to.

A stupid little notification about my iCloud settings keeps popping up, and it's irritating me. It's telling me about someone logging onto something.

"Who fucking cares?!" My slurring rumbles turn to laughter. "Fix your shit, Steve Jobs." I cackle out loud and my dumb friends laugh with me. "Oh, wait… he's dead. My bad." I burst out laughing some more.

I'm trying to swipe away the notification, but I can't get it to go leave. I'm really fucking fucked up, but still, something is tickling my mind. Like a thought that wants more attention.

Squinting at my phone, awareness tightens my chest as my sluggish mind picks up speed and I blink.

Who else would log into my account?

"No…" I mumble, eyes widening in realization. "No no no."

My fingers are trembling as I pull up my camera roll, locating the video I recorded the other night, of me and Tauren. Clicking on its details, I freeze.

It uploaded to my iCloud account.

"Fuck!" I growl, my head shaking over and over.

Paris jumps, startled by my outburst. "What's wrong?"

"She saw it." My stomach is churning. "She's been fucking looking at all my shit like a stalker bitch and she *saw it*?! Fuck my life!"

"Relax, man," Charlie drawls. "Who saw what?"

I'm not even listening to them. I'm too busy freaking the fuck out.

It was *my fault… It was all me. I really am the reason Tauren's life is ruined.*

Mom was right. I *am* a curse.

My brain is so heavy it feels like my neck is going to give out.

I scramble to delete the video, praying that she didn't save it already. But knowing my mother, she definitely did. This is her insurance, after all. Her VIP ticket to bypass Tauren's prenup and take everything he has.

My brows zip together while my chin wobbles, heavy, brutal tears pushing from behind my eyes. I really fucked up this time. Because I'm a fuck-up. A worthless waste of existence.

They're all better off without me.

"I gotta go," I grumble, attempting to stand up.

The weed, the booze, and the drugs are all hitting me at once. My legs aren't really working as I stumble and almost fall into the pool. Luckily, Paris grabs my arm at the last second. Charlie and Isla are dying laughing while my feet shuffle and I try to walk away.

"Is he barefoot?" Charlie falls onto his side.

"Colson, just sit down," Paris pleads. "Stay here and hang out."

"Can't… I gotta… I gotta see him." My head is spinning, but it doesn't matter.

I need to leave now. I need to get to…

"Who?" Paris is holding me up by my waist.

"Good question," I mutter.

“Col, stay,” she begs some more, brushing my hair back with her fingers.

Before I know what’s happening, she’s up on her tippy toes, pressing her lips to mine. I shouldn’t be so startled. We’ve definitely made out before. But let’s be real, I’ve done a lot of things with girls over the years that my heart hasn’t been in. And after spending the weekend kissing two people whose lips give me the best chills of my life, I can’t pretend this does anything for me.

With Paris kissing me, my heavy brain doesn’t have the strength to fight anymore.

“I’m gay,” I mumble into her mouth.

Her lips stay on mine for a moment, though she’s stopped moving. When she pulls away, she’s giving me a look like I’m insane. “What??”

“I like dudes,” I grunt, then shift away from her. “Gotta go.”

I hear Charlie cackling as I stumble out of the backyard. “He’s so random.”

I drop my keys twice before getting into the car. I know I shouldn’t be driving… I’m drunk and high and on the verge of a mental breakdown.

But I also can’t really find it in myself to care about that right now.

Starting up the engine and peeling away, I swerve back onto the road, turning up the music full blast. My eyelids droop as I press my bare foot down on the pedal, speeding up well past the speed limit.

I’m a disaster, a disappointment. A life ruiner.

Maybe I should end it…

Swerve into a tree. Or off a cliff.

Everything is rushing so fast, all my thoughts speeding past like the objects outside my car. Coming up to a winding road, I’m not steering very well, veering into the other lane, skidding through dirt and gravel when I swerve back. I’m drunk and high, so it might be because of that. Or it might be because I just *don’t care* if I live or die anymore. I’m a curse.

The world will be better off.

Screaming at the top of my lungs, I jerk the steering wheel right.

I’m sorry, Cy…

My car launches over a dip and flies off the road.

But something happens. A voice shouts at me to *stop!* It’s like an instinct, a piece of my brain that can overcome all the rest of the mess that’s up there. It sounds like Cyrus.

The adrenaline kicks on in a split seconds and I slam on the brakes. Hard.

Just before I reach the edge of a giant ravine.

My car skids to a halt, so close the front bumper taps the median.

My heart is jack hammering aggressively in my chest while I pant and suck in air. I can't get enough oxygen to calm down and I'm shaking so hard I'm practically convulsing.

Whipping open the car door, I stumble out of the driver's seat. I didn't even have my seatbelt on…

I would've died.

I throw up on the ground next to me, then roar at the top of my lungs, "I *should've* died! FUCK THIS!"

Growling and gasping, my brain so fogged with fury and fear and hatred, I punch my rear window. Cocking back, I punch it again, and again, blood smearing on the glass from my knuckles while I scream and cry.

I didn't drive over the edge of the cliff, but I've fallen off the edge of my fucking sanity.

I'm *sick*… and I know I'm in the middle of an episode, but I can't find the will to break through it. Everything I'm feeling is building and building and it's all too much.

When I can't feel my hand anymore, I fall to my knees in the dirt and cover my face. I sob into my palms, ripping at my hair while my stomach clenches in pain and I struggle to breathe.

"I hate myself," I whimper as tears tumble down my cheeks.

The sound of my phone ringing pulls my attention. Breathing in sharp, ragged breaths, I manage to pull my phone out of my pocket with my left hand.

"Col?? Where are you? Are you okay?" Cyrus gasps the second I answer the call. Like he already knows.

He *knows* exactly what's going on. Because he's the other piece of me. The better piece.

I can't stop crying enough to tell him anything.

"Hang on. I'm coming to you." He sounds more confident than I've ever heard him before. "Can you pin me your location?"

I nod and croak the word *yes*.

"Good. Do it now," he demands firmly. It's mesmerizing to hear him so sure. *For me.*

My trembling fingers send him a pin of my location, and he immediately says, “Got it. Don’t move, B. I’m coming for you. I’ll be right there.”

I cry a little harder as I hang up, curling up into a ball on the ground.

I highly doubt Mom would let him use her car, so I assume he’s skating here. It’ll probably take him twenty-minutes. I should probably get off the ground, just in case a passerby thinks I’m dead. I really don’t want to deal with any humans who aren’t my brother right now.

Or… Tauren.

I whimper when his name pops into my head. I’m the reason he’s staying in a hotel right now. About to lose everything he’s worked so hard for. *I suck.*

Swiping the tears from my cheeks, I stand up on wobbly legs and get back into my car. I crawl into the passenger seat, then pull the keys out of the ignition and toss them into the backseat. This way if a cop stops, he can’t say I was driving under the influence.

See? I’m smart sometimes.

Curling up into a ball, I focus on breathing. The throbbing pain in my hand is severe, almost as bad as the pounding inside my skull and the intense aching contractions happening in my stomach. I think my hand is definitely broken…

My lower lip trembles. I won’t be able to play guitar for weeks.

I just can’t seem to stop fucking up my life. *Why am I such a disaster??*

Less than fifteen minutes later, the sounds of a skateboard on gravel warm my chest, relief flooding into my bloodstream. *My brother is here.*

I expect him to hop into the driver's seat. But instead, my door whips open, and Cyrus falls to his knees in the dirt.

“Col… Jesus, are you alright??” He looks so worried.

I can’t stop staring at his face. *Mine.*

His eyes shine and his chin wobbles as he launches himself at me, hugging onto me as hard as humanly possible. He’s sort of strangling me to death, but I love it. It feels like he’s healing me.

“You scared the shit out of me,” he mumbles into the crook of my neck, and chills brush my skin.

“I… I’m sorry.”

Minutes later, Cyrus detaches from me, pulling back to look me over. He stares at me for many weighted seconds, tons of heavy things hanging in

the air between us. I sniff and he blinks.

His thumb grazes my cheek. “You have blood here.”

“It’s from my hand.” I show him my bruised and bloody knuckles.

He doesn’t scold me, or ask what happened. He simply takes my hand in his and brings it to his lips, pressing a gentle kiss.

“Cyrus…” I croak, and his shimmery green eyes meet mine. “I’m fucked up. I’m… so *fucking* fucked up I can’t see.” Pressure builds in my face again, and I can’t stop myself from crying. “What’s wrong with me?”

“Baby, nothing,” he whispers, climbing up into the seat with me, to hold on to me tight some more. His fingers brush through my hair while I fall apart. “Tell me how you feel.”

“I feel *awful*,” I gasp. “I ruined everything. I ruined Tauren’s life.”

“No, you didn’t,” he insists. “Tauren made his own choices, Col. It wasn’t your fault. I mean… we all did what we did. And we liked it. So we’re all responsible. But it’s not *your* fault. You haven’t ruined anything, and you don’t have to carry all this bullshit on your shoulders.”

Taking in a deep breath, I let it out slowly. “I can’t believe you’re comforting me right now. Don’t I usually do this for you?”

He chuckles, then looks down so our eyes lock. “We do it for each other. I help you when you need me, and you help me when I need you. Which is always, by the way.”

My lips curl into a hesitant grin. “I always need you, too.” But the smile falls away. “You know that, don’t you?”

His head tilts. He chews on his lower lip for a moment, before nodding. “Yea. I think so.”

Straightening up, I press my palm flat over his chest. “No, Cy… I do. I’m fucking serious.”

He nods again. “Okay. I’m just saying, though… you’re *everything* to me.”

“You’re everything to me, too.” He gives me a skeptical look. “You are. All those fake friends… the fake girlfriends… They’re not real, Cyrus. It’s just like… a costume, or camouflage. To make it seem like I’m alright. But I’m fucking not.”

He gapes at me for a moment in silence. “What are you saying?”

Swallowing hard, I force my shivers to still as I mumble, “They don’t know me, Cyrus. No one does. Only you. And I can try to push it away and deny it all I want, but I’m lonely, and sad, and… I think I’m gay.” I pause

and take a breath, shaking my head. “I mean, I *am*. I’m gay… also. Which isn’t bad like those other things, but I just wanted you to know.”

My brother’s face is completely frozen. It kind of makes me want to laugh, if I wasn’t so sad and scared.

It takes him a few seconds, but finally he lets out a breathy chuckle and shakes his head. “Really??”

I nod, biting back my own grin. “I mean… yea. You really didn’t think…?”

He shrugs. “I thought maybe you were bi or something. You hook up with *a lot* of girls, Colson.”

“Yea.” I roll my eyes. “Because everyone told me I had to. It was like, my image. A part of my disguise.”

Cyrus’s pained smile goes wide. He’s visibly upset for me, but also happy about my confession. The good part.

His hands slide inside my hoodie, running up my chest, then my neck, before his fingertips are brushing my jaw. “What’s underneath this mask?”

If a meteor hit the earth and destroyed humanity, leaving only me and him inside this car… Even then, *nothing* would be more urgent than the need to kiss his lips right now.

Leaning forward, I press my mouth to his, soft yet urgent, swallowing up the sweet sound of his needy hum. Next thing I know, I’m pushing him against the seat and crawling on top of him, fingers in his hair and on his throat.

“How is anything good ever supposed to measure up to this bad?” I whisper in his mouth, and he groans quietly.

“I know,” he purrs. “We were doomed from the start.”

Our tongues tangle, lips moving together in a lust so hot the windows are instantly fogged up. I can’t stop from writhing into him while he arches up to me, hands on my ass pulling me closer. Reaching between us, I rub his growing erection while he shudders, gripping it until I wince and whine.

He tugs his mouth away. “Baby… your hand hurts that bad?” I can’t help the shy smile on my lips while I nod at him and he takes my hand in his, examining it. “You probably need to go to the hospital.” When I don’t respond, his eyes flit up to mine and his brows zip. “Why are you smiling?”

“Can you always call me *baby*?” I mumble and he laughs.

“Mmm… probably not.” He grins, dropping a kiss on my lower lip.

“Only in secret?” I whisper on his mouth. He nods. Slinking my left hand around his throat, I tell him, “Tauren gave you some confidence, good twin. I like it.”

“You both did,” he corrects me. “*Together*. If it weren’t for this weekend, I never would have realized…” His voice cuts out, and I pull back to give him my full attention.

“Realized what?”

His eyes sparkle in the low light of just one nearby streetlamp. “That it’s okay if I’m wicked inside. Because you guys are, too.”

His pouty lips quirk and I can’t help but laugh. Once it trails off though, I remember that we’re in a terrible position because of how messed up we are. Tauren is suffering… And I feel terrible.

“He helped me too, Cy,” I tell my brother. “I feel like I finally know who I am. And I think he was right… About the meds. About Dr. Roberts…”

Cyrus nods in agreement. He plays with my hair for another few minutes while we stare at each other. With him here, breathing is so much easier.

With him beneath my fingertips, life doesn’t feel as hopeless.

Eventually, Cyrus gets out of the car and grabs his skateboard, tossing it into the trunk. Then he hops into the driver’s seat and drives us away, heading in the direction of the nearest emergency room first.

My hand does hurt like a bitch, but I’m still glad to be going anywhere other than home right now. The distress of knowing we’ll have to face Mom again looms. I wish there was somewhere else we could go tonight…

I wish we could go to Tauren.

“Mom told me she saw you and Tauren on the cameras over the pool,” Cyrus mumbles while he drives.

“There are cameras over the pool??” I’m thoroughly surprised by this information. *I wonder where else she’s been spying on us.*

“I guess so,” he sighs, despondent. “She also saw the video from your phone. She thinks it was me, obviously.”

“But she’s still blaming me, right?” I roll my eyes out the window. “And Tauren.”

“Pretty much,” he mutters.

I shake my head. “This is so stupid. I fucking hate her.”

“I know. Me too.” His thumb taps on the steering wheel.

“What do we do?” I turn my head, resting my temple on the headrest so I can watch him.

After a quiet moment of thought, he answers, “I’m not sure. Maybe we could just bide our time? Lay low until after our birthday, and then we can find a way to… see him.”

I can’t believe that we’re both thinking of Tauren like the other piece to this strange new relationship. And here I thought I hated him… Turns out all I needed was to push my mom out of the picture.

It’s crazy, but I think at this point we’re embracing the crazy.

“I can’t stand thinking about what she might do…” I blink.

“Hopefully, she doesn’t do anything stupid. His prenup will hold up, even with the infidelity. I mean, she’ll get what she wants, but Tauren will be fine. It’s in Mom’s best interest to keep everything a secret.” He peeks at me. “It makes her look bad, too.”

My stomach is in knots. I hate this. I hate all of it.

The uncertainty, the stress, the thought of someone else suffering for something I could have prevented. It’s so easy for me to blame myself.

Cyrus reaches with his right hand, taking my left over the console. Our fingers lace, and they stay that way the whole time, until we eventually have to let go.

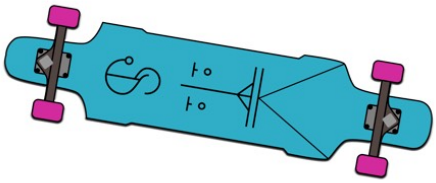
No matter what, we’ll always have each other. Unfortunately, it has to stay in secret.

Because *I will endure any and every force of pain to keep him happy.*

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CYRUS



I ’m living in a waking nightmare.

The fact that I thought I knew stress before is laughable. The pious thoughts that drove my anxiety before are now looking like a peaceful vacation.

A trek through the misty moors of Scotland. A stroll down the cobblestone roads of London Town. A swim in the crystalline waters of Australia.

All places I wish I could disappear to after what we’ve been dealing with here for the past week.

Tauren’s gone. Meaning the only semblance of family we’d had in this house in years, if not ever, has vanished, having been replaced with infinite silence.

The conversation is over. The attempts at family dinners, the kindness and caring, the buffer between us and Mom… That’s all gone.

Honestly, it feels a little like when we lived in Oceanside. Except for one big difference…

At least when we were at Aunt Lily’s, I had Colson. I had him all the time to keep me company, not just in the dark of night.

Now, *everything* is different. And it’s awful.

Mom won’t let him near me. My own *brother*. She blames him for everything that happened with Tauren, and it’s completely fucked up. I’ve tried explaining to her that it wasn’t his fault, and that it wasn’t Tauren’s either, but of course, she won’t hear it. As far as she’s concerned, Colson has been corrupting me since we were fifteen and Dad caught us kissing.

Little does she know, I was in love with him long before that.

She's been watching us like a hawk since the night I brought a depressed and shoeless Colson home with a fractured hand. She won't even let us drive to school together anymore. She makes me take the car, and hired a chauffeur, to cart Colson to and from school, even though we both know he's more of a babysitter than a driver.

Some big nameless oaf, who hasn't spoken more than two words in front of either of us. He's clearly a spy… Always watching and reporting back to Mom. It makes it nearly impossible for Colson and me to spend time together. Or for us to attempt contact with Tauren.

She's even been monitoring our phone calls, internet activity… the works. Last night, I lingered in front of Colson's bedroom door for ten seconds and she popped her head out of hers to give me the evil eye.

It feels like we're in prison, and it's an honest to God disaster. Going from the ultimate high of last weekend to the devastating low of our lives now is the worst kind of heartache.

No Tauren… No Colson. I'm alone for real this time.

I would take the guilt, uncertainty, shame, and self-loathing I used to feel over this *any day*. To quote my brother, this shit fucking sucks.

Graduation is in two days. I'm giving my speech as valedictorian, which I'm not looking forward to in the slightest. Let's just say my confidence is a bit shattered, and what little excitement I had garnered to stand up in front of hundreds of people has flown right out the window.

Before everything went down, I don't think my mother had even intended on showing up to graduation. But *now* she will, for two reasons more than anything else: To make sure Colson stays at least six feet away from me at all times…

And to keep an eye out for Tauren.

Tauren was never shy with his excitement over our graduating, especially my valedictorian speech. We'd even planned a big party at our house afterward, which is still happening of course. Mom would never let the absence of her new husband stop her from corralling the attention and draping it all over herself. It's not so much a graduation party for Colson and me as it is a way for our mother to gain sympathy with her rich friends, and talk shit about her soon-to-be ex.

It's such bullshit. She's a great actress in front of everyone else, but Colson and I know the truth. She's *ecstatic* to be purging Tauren's assets.

This is exactly the kind of drama she loves more than anything. More than her two sons, and the fact that they're graduating, and definitely more than Tauren Vance.

The throbbing pain in my chest mirrors that in my head. My anxiety has been through the roof lately, and it's been taking its toll. I haven't been sleeping or eating much. I know I look like shit, but I can't find it in myself to care.

All I can think about is Tauren, alone, living in a hotel. *And my brother…*

Glancing up the hall, I watch him at his locker. We're at school to pick up our caps and gowns, and clear out our lockers, which I've already done. And now I'm just staring at Colson. His obsidian hair is all strewn about, black nail polish back on his fingertips. He's wearing his own clothes again, torn-up black jeans and a band t-shirt he ripped the sleeves off of. And he has eyeliner on, the charcoal smudges beneath his eyes serving as an outlet to express his pain.

He looks like every bit of turmoil I can feel inside his heart… Tethered to my own by a bond so strong, it'll take my mother more than just hired security and some privacy invasion to break.

Closing my locker, I wander over to my brother slowly, keeping an eye out for any of his friends. I'm not in the mood to deal with his obnoxious posse right now. But believe it or not, I haven't seen them around him at all in the last week.

I know Colson is going through it right now, and from what he told me the night I came to rescue him and take him to the hospital for his hand, he's done faking it with fake friends. I'm happy for him as much as I feel bad. I'm glad he's coming to terms with things… But I also know how much it sucks to be alone.

I'm dying to be there for him… If only our mother would piss the fuck off for a second.

I can tell he sees me coming, but he doesn't react. He simply keeps staring lifelessly into his empty locker.

"Hey," I mumble, glancing left and right, half expecting Mom or the bodyguard babysitter to pop up out of nowhere and drag me away from him.

His green eyes flit to mine for a second before he slams his locker shut with his braced hand. "Sup."

“Are you… Are you doing alright?” I ask quietly, nervous that he’ll be upset with me, though I’m not sure why. I didn’t do anything.

“Oh yea,” he hums sarcastically. “My life rules. Watch out, world. Colson Tha God is here to reign.”

I can’t help the little smirk that tugs at my lips. I’ve been missing his asshole-ish tendencies.

“Hey, at least you’re graduating.” I grin. “Proving all the haters wrong…”

He scoffs. “You know they just don’t want me coming back next year.”

“Yea.” I chuckle. “True.”

His mouth curves like he wants to smile at me. But then he smothers it and looks past me down the hall. “I should go. Can’t be late for Shrek the driver. He’s bringing me to Dr. Roberts. Apparently, while I’m still living under Mom’s roof, I have to see him twice a week now.”

“What??” I flinch. “That’s ridiculous.”

“Yea, no shit.” He sniffs, then turns like he’s about to walk away.

I hate this so much.

Keeping my voice as low as it’ll go, I lean in. “I miss you.”

He pauses, and I witness him falter, his throat adjusting as he stares down at his beat-up combat boots. He stays silent, which is such a Colson move it makes me want to launch myself at him right here in the hall.

“Have you spoken with… him?” I ask quickly.

Colson’s eyes jump up to mine. I can’t help but notice how bloodshot they are. And how small his pupils are…

“No, Cy. I haven’t,” he whispers firmly. “We need to forget about him. As long as we’re still under Mom’s thumb, we can’t think about him anymore. It’ll just bring on more pain and I can’t…” His voice gives out, and he clears his throat. “I’ve already fucked up enough for one lifetime. I’m keeping my head down… Sorry.”

Before I can say anything else, he stomps away from me, gripping his backpack tightly in his fist.

And I watch him, the link between us stretching thinner and thinner the farther he goes.

The sinking feeling in my gut just won’t go away. I don’t care if Colson doesn’t see it… I *need* to speak with Tauren. I can’t wait anymore.

Stalking up the hall, I notice a few looks from a couple of classmates lingering in the halls. But I just ignore it and keep my head down. My

anxiety is making me more paranoid than usual. All that confidence I was feeling, from Carey's party, to last weekend with Tauren, and my talk with Colson in the car… It seems to have vanished.

I'm more insecure, and lonelier than ever.

On my way to the exit, I spot one of my Science Club friends.

"Hey, Embry," I murmur.

He gives me a strangely hesitant look I can't figure out. "Hey…"

I don't have time to worry about his weirdness right now. "Can I use your phone?"

"Um, sure. What's wrong with yours?" he asks, even though he's unlocking his and handing it to me.

"I don't have it with me," I mutter, grabbing the phone from his hand, ignoring his look of confusion as I wander off for some privacy.

I dial Tauren's number and bring it to my ear while it rings. I'm nervous as hell, shaky and beyond eager to hear his voice. *A weeks feels like an eternity.*

Disheartened, I'm about to just hang up since it seems like he might not answer for a number he doesn't recognize. Until a deep, familiar brogue rumbles into my ear, almost knocking me down.

"Hello?"

God, even just one word has me melting everywhere. I missed his voice like a beautiful song I'm being forbidden from listening to.

"H-hi. Tauren?" I squeeze my eyes shut at my meek, stupid choice of words. *Why am I asking if it's him when I know it is?!*

He hesitates for a moment. "Yes…?"

"It's… Cyrus." My voice shivers.

He's quiet again, for longer this time. I actually pull the phone away from my ear to make sure he hasn't hung up on me.

When he comes back, he's softer, as if he thinks someone nearby is listening to him. "Um… Hey. Hi." He sounds flustered and I'm swooning.

"I'm sorry to be calling…" I mutter. "This is my friend's phone."

He makes a noise, as if he'd expected my mom to be monitoring our phone calls to make sure he doesn't contact us, but now he has verification.

"I just wanted to see how you're doing and tell you…" I suck in a breath and let it out slowly to calm my nerves. "That I miss you."

"*Fuck*…" he grumbles under his breath. "Cy, I miss you too. Like *crazy*. But we really shouldn't be speaking…"

“I know. I’m sorry…”

“Don’t apologize. Are you okay? How’s your brother?”

My heart is bleeding out in my chest. I don’t want us to have to whisper to each other over the phone in secret. And that all he seems to care about is whether Col and me are doing alright… *Typical Tauren.*

He’s perfect. And this all sucks so bad.

“We’re doing okay,” I answer. “I mean, as okay as we can with Mom watching our every move. She won’t even let me speak to him.”

“Jesus…” His enraged growl vibrates into the phone, shooting an inconvenient thump into my balls.

“It’s ridiculous. I’ve been so… *worried* about you,” I tell him honestly, fidgeting from the flutters in my gut, at confessing these things to him in such a forbidden scenario.

“I don’t want you worrying about me, baby,” he whispers, and I can’t help how my knees give out at him calling me *baby*. I slant up against the nearest wall, covering my heart with my hand. “I’m fine. I can handle your mother. I just want you to try your hardest to watch out for your brother. I know he’s blaming himself…”

I nod slowly. “Yea, sort of. Okay, maybe a lot. Mom’s not making it any easier.”

“I know,” he sighs, his somber tone breaking my heart in two. “I’ll see what I can do to get her to back off. Really, I’m just trying to placate her for now. If I keep her happy during the divorce, she should leave you two out of it.”

“Yea, but, Tauren… You can’t take the blame for everything. It wasn’t your fault…”

“It *was*, though,” he insists. “I’m the adult here, Cyrus. Regardless of how you and Colson feel, you’re both still technically underage. I should’ve known better… Made better choices, or—”

“Fuck that,” I cut him off, standing back up so I can pace. “We’re *adults*. There’s no goddamn difference between right now and six fucking days from now.”

“I know, love. I get it,” he hums. “But it’s the law. And if your mom wants to fuck me over, apparently I’ve made it very easy for her.”

“I won’t let her,” I grunt. “I’ll do whatever I have to. She can’t get away with this.”

He’s quiet for a moment before he breathes sorrowfully into the phone. “Look at it from her point of view…”

“Nope. Not interested.” I shake my head. “She’s never given a shit about me or Colson. She’s always treated us like accessories. We’re just ways for her to get attention and make it all about *her*. Like when my dad got sent to jail, and she used us for sympathy. *Boo hoo, look at me, the single mother with two kids.* Not once did she actually check on us, during all of it. She’s never asked me how I’m doing, if I’m okay… It’s always just *Cyrus the smart one*, the one who’s going to make her rich someday. Well, fuck that. I’m not her *property*, and Colson is not her burden.”

Tears push from behind my eyes, and I rub them hard, reminding myself that I can’t do this here.

“Okay, okay. Shh. It’s okay, baby.” Tauren’s deep bass consoles me, even from miles away. “I’m so sorry you’re dealing with this.”

“Tauren, I’ve been dealing with this all my fucking life.” My chin wobbles.

The truth in that statement feels like a million pounds of weight on my shoulders. My anxiety is taking over and I’m finding it hard to catch my breath.

“Breathe for me, baby,” he commands in that comforting tone of his. The love he possesses… It heals me.

Taking in a deep breath, I hold on to it, then let it out slowly.

“I’ll figure this out,” he tells me with certainty, sounding stronger than he has this entire conversation. “I have a great team of lawyers. We’re gonna make this work. And once it’s all over, I’ll come for you and your brother. I promise. I’m not leaving you two, no matter what happens.”

I nod and bite my lip to stop it from trembling. “I wish you could come to graduation…”

“Me too, baby,” he breathes unsteadily, smashing me to bits. “But you’ll do great, regardless. I’m so proud of you.”

My head drops forward as my eyes close. *I love you, Tauren. God, I fucking love you…*

My fingers twitch and I swallow thickly.

“I’ve gotta go, love.” His soft voice fills the tense silence.

“Okay…” I rub my temples to push away the migraine.

“Just remember, Cyrus… I’m with you, even when I’m not *with* you.”

I'm going to break the fuck down, tears fighting with pressure building up in my face. I nod over and over again as if he can see me, afraid to speak because he'll hear how weak I am in my voice. And I'm supposed to be *strong*.

He taught me to be resilient, confident in myself. Just like Colson did.

And now I need to be enough of that for both of them.



I ALWAYS THOUGHT my high school graduation would be more of a joyous event than it's turning out to be. After all, I'm the valedictorian. I'm graduating top of my class, sailing out of here on a science scholarship that only ten students a year are chosen for. I should be much more excited for this moment.

Unfortunately, the achievements mean next to nothing when I can't share them with the only two people who mean *anything* to me.

We're all dressed up in our caps and gowns, two-hundred students seated at our outdoor ceremony, listening to Dean Granger speak about our accomplishments. I'm sitting up on the stage, since my speech is happening next.

I got here late, by myself, and haven't even really had time to speak with anyone. I'm so nervous I've already thrown up twice. All I want is to be able to look at Colson while I do this, but I don't even see him anywhere. I don't see my mother either, though that's not much of a surprise.

I'm really trying to calm my nerves while I sit and wait, but it's difficult when I feel like I'm doing this all alone. I glance over my index cards for the eight hundredth time, but the words are all blurring together.

Just breathe, Cyrus. You can do this.

I hear Tauren's voice in my mind… *Breathe for me, baby.*

A snicker pulls me out of my head, and I peer left. There's are a couple of girls standing off to the side of the backstage area giggling. And they keep looking at me.

Swallowing hard, I ignore them and try to focus. My hands are shaking and sweaty while I listen to the dean, whispers and murmurs behind me

getting to be too much.

Turning over my shoulder, I glare at them, only to find them already *staring* at me, again. One of the girls, Kelly, smirks, then whispers something to her friend. The friend bursts out laughing. A faculty member actually has to shush them.

Okay, so they're talking shit about me right before my valedictorian speech. This is really fun.

I barely know those girls at all. What could they possibly be saying about me? *That I'm a nerd?? Yea, we've already established that.*

My knee bounces rapidly while I attempt once more to tune it all out. I just wish Colson was here. And not so he could fight my battles for me and tell them off. I don't need him for that. I need him for moral support.

I'm freaking the hell out right now.

Standing up from my chair, I step forward, peeking out into the crowd. Still no sign of him. *Where the hell is he??*

And now I'm worried about my brother, too.

Dean Granger wraps up his commendations and begins to introduce me. One of the staff asks me if I'm ready, though she doesn't actually wait for me to answer before muttering, *break a leg* and wandering off.

Break a leg is for stage performances, not speeches. Though I am on a stage, and this is definitely a performance, in the sense that I don't really feel like myself and I might pass out.

"Let's welcome your valedictorian, Cyrus Becker."

Oh God, someone save me.

Dean Granger motions for me and I walk out onto the stage to applause that's nearly drowned out by my racing pulse.

Up at the podium, I feel like I could faint. My plan is to keep this brief, since I'm terrified of public speaking. Also, I know the attention spans of my fellow graduates are lacking as it is.

Taking in a deep breath, I say, "Thank you, Dean Granger," and set my eyes on my notecards.

A cough and some murmurs distract me, my eyes flinging up to the crowd. It looks like a few of the jocks I don't particularly care for are whispering to each other.

My anxious paranoia must be getting the best of me today. First the girls backstage and now these fools?

Just say your speech and get it over with.

“I’m so proud to be standing up here before such an amazing class.” I force myself to project into the microphone, then subtly suck in another deep breath to calm my racing heart rate. *If I need to use my inhaler up here, they’ll really have something to laugh about. Assholes.* “I could use this time to tell you about what I’ve learned and experienced during my three years here at Solana Beach Prep… But I think it would be more beneficial to everyone if I told you about what I learned during the semester I was gone.”

The jocks are still whispering and laughing. A member of the faculty races over to reprimand them, but still. Now I’m sort of panicking. *What are they talking about?? Why are they doing this to me?*

And where’s Colson??

“Um…” I stammer, shaking so hard my knees are wobbling. “For those of who you who don’t know… My brother and I spent our junior year living in Oceanside. And that experience is responsible for as much of what brought me here as anything… else.”

My eyes scan over the rest of the audience who seem to be getting restless. I’m *sure* I’m just imagining it. I have to be… Because it seems like something I’m not privy to is going on out there and it’s fucking me all up.

I spot Carey and his friends, all of whom look concerned for me. Carey leans over to a girl seated next to them and whispers something to her. She whispers back.

Carey’s face drops. He covers his mouth, then whispers to Dom, who starts laughing.

My vision is blurring. I’m lightheaded and dizzy and I really think I need to sit.

This isn’t working. I want to be done.

“The… experience…” I croak, trying my hardest to be strong, though I don’t think I have it in me. I can’t stand up here while people make fun of me and just take it… I’m not made of metal.

“Stepdad fucker!” someone shouts out loud, and people burst out into fits of laughter.

A chill washes over me. My stomach is in my shoes.

What…?

I’m just standing, frozen.

What did he just say??

I’m gripping the podium with white knuckles to prevent myself from falling over, while people in the crowd point and laugh.

And not that I can hear what they’re saying, but in my mind, their taunts echo… *Look at the freak!*

Nerdy little gay boy.

Adulterer!

Holy crap, I *am* Hester fucking Prynne.

Dean Granger rushes over and grabs me by the shoulders, as if he can somehow shield me from the humiliation I’m experiencing. “Alright, that’s enough!” he barks into the microphone, then scuttles me off the stage.

I can’t even move my legs or feet. He has to physically *drag* me.

What… just… happened?

Stepdad fucker??

How…?!

I’m struggling for breath as Dean Granger brings me to a chair and sits me down. My shaky fingers slip into my pocket, and I grab my inhaler, almost dropping it as I bring it to my lips.

Granger rushes off, but now there seems to be pandemonium happening around me. Faculty members are rushing about while everyone gives me dirty looks.

I have to get out of here.

“Cyrus!” someone calls my name, but unfortunately, it’s not Colson.

It’s Paris. His… girlfriend?

I’m confused.

She scampers over to me. “Are you alright?”

Shaking my head, I let out a breath after holding in my medicine. “Been better.”

She takes me by the arm and helps me stand up. “Come on. I’m getting you out of here.”

“W-what? Why?” I stutter, though I’m still going with her because, honestly, being anywhere in the world sounds better than being here right now.

How the hell did they find out?? What happened?

“Colson sent me to get you,” she says, walking me around back toward the exit of the stage.

“Huh?” I’m still shaking like a leaf, and I can barely process her words.

I can’t believe this is my graduation… The day I’ve been looking forward to for four long years.

It wasn’t supposed to go down like this. Although at the same time, I’ve never been happier about the prospect of never *ever* seeing these assholes again. *Silver lining, I guess.*

There are eyes all over us as we leave through the back. People are murmuring and whispering, some just saying shit out loud.

“Did you hear?”

“He slept with his mother’s husband!”

“How messed up is that?”

“What a freak!”

“Piss off, you fucking twats!” Paris hisses at a group of girls giggling nearby as we rush across the football field toward the parking lot.

I know I’m in the midst of a meltdown, but I can’t help peeking up at Paris and giving her a small grin. I don’t know why she’s helping me… I guess just as a favor to Colson, but still. It’s pretty cool.

“Where *is* Colson?” My voice shakes while we hustle through a mob of laughter, judging eyes and wicked taunts I’m trying like hell to ignore.

“He’s outside the stadium,” she tells me.

“Why?”

“Your mom paid security not to let him in until after your speech.”

If my teeth weren’t chattering right now, I’d be grinding them to dust.

Fucking psycho bitch!

We’re just about at the exit to the parking lot when someone jogs in front of us. My stomach bunches up in frustrated angst.

It’s Jared Milligan. *Aka* my former friend who turned into a huge asshole after I left his party that time when I was fifteen, and an even huger asshole when we came back from Oceanside.

Awesome. A reunion.

Paris and I try to move around him, but he gets up close to me and blocks us.

“Great speech up there, Becker.” Jared laughs, looking and sounding every bit like the obnoxious weasel he is. “Just goes to show even smart people can suck.” His grin widens. “Get it?”

“Fuck out of our way, tiny dick Milligan,” Paris spits. “Come on, Cyrus.”

Jared's face turns red in his anger, and he blocks us once more. Glancing over my shoulder, it looks like there's a crowd forming around us… *Or should I call it a lynch mob?*

"You using girls as bodyguards now, Cy?" He shakes his head. "That's weak. But I'd expect nothing less from a pansy like you."

Rage burns in my veins like acid. *I've had fucking enough.*

Stepping up to him, my gaze narrows. "What the fuck do you even want, Jared?"

"I don't want anything from you." His smirk turns from weaselly to wicked. "I just wanted to tell you that I knew I was right."

I swallow down the lump of nerves that's trying to choke me to death. "What does that even mean?"

"I told everyone you were just a scared little queer back in the day." He huffs. "Turns out, I was dead right! And not only that, you let your mom's husband take a ride!" His eyes are dark as he pins me in place. "That's low, even for someone who likes being on all fours."

Something inside me snaps.

Wrath sweeps through my limbs, and I lunge, shoving Jared hard in the chest until he stumbles backward. When he regains his footing, he comes back to me like he might swing.

I've never fought a day in my life, but I'm prepared for whatever pain it brings me. I'm standing up to this prick, no matter what. I guess this is what happens when you have nothing left to lose. *What would Batman do…*

"Don't touch me, faggot," Jared grunts in my face, bumping against me. "Who knows where your hands have been."

"Maybe they've been on your dad's dick," I growl and shove him again.

I hear Paris say *oh snap* at my side, but I'm too busy watching the beet-red face before mine as Jared comes back, this time giving me a shove. But since I know how to stand properly, I barely move. Plus, he's really not much bigger than me at all.

My adrenaline is jacked, my head clouded with nothing but fear and rage mixed up into a potent cocktail. I can *feel* people staring at me, the crowd circled around us shouting and seething for a fight. My lungs are tight, but I ignore it as best I can and wait for him to make a move.

But instead…

"What the fuck did you just call him?" I hear the growly voice of my brother, and my face whips right.

Colson is storming over to us, eyes alit with fury. There are two security guards, my mother, and that babysitter asshole hot on his trail, but he doesn't seem to give a flying fuck. He looks like he's about to break this kid's head open.

When I glance back at Jared, I see him faltering, which makes sense. Colson is very scary. Especially after what he did to Jared's friend a few months ago.

"This isn't your fight, Colson," Jared rumbles as Colson stomps up to us, not stopping until his left hand—the one not in the brace—is around Jared's throat.

"What… *the fuck*… did you just call him?" my brother snarls in Jared's face,

He tries to yank out of Colson's grip. "I called him a *faggot*. Because that's what he is, just like your perverted creeper of a stepdad."

Colson's eye twitches. The lines of his face are angled with shadows of wrath. But he actually releases Jared's throat and takes a step back. Some relief floods my system. I don't want Colson to fight. I don't want to either.

Unfortunately, Jared uses the situation to continue running his mouth. "I'm sorry your twin is such a buttslut, Becker. Tell your mom I'm available if she's looking for a man who will actually fuck her without pretending she's a guy."

The moment the last word leaves his lips, Colson's fist is being mashed into Jared's face.

Everything is in slow motion as I watch my brother's left arm swinging. He punches Jared so hard, so fast, he nails him in the nose three times before I can even blink. Jared flies backward, crumbling onto the ground.

But Colson isn't done.

He jumps on top of Jared, holding his throat with his brace while he pummels him over and over, snarling and roaring as he goes. Blood is just *pouring* out of Jared's face, dripping from my brother's knuckles while I stand still, frozen in shock.

All I can think about is what Jared was saying…

How does he know what happened?? Did he find out and tell everyone, or did someone else tell him? Who started all this??

Time speeds back up as more people rush over. Screams and shouts echo around me, from just about everyone. It's fucking *chaos*.

Security guards pile onto my brother, ripping him off Jared. It literally takes two men almost twice his size to get him to stop. Jared's mother flings herself onto the ground by her son's limp body, bellowing hysterically while clutching his bloody face.

"Colson, you goddamn monster!" our mother shrieks, grabbing him by the arm. "What have you done?!"

He yanks out of her grip. "What have *you* done, Mom??" She simply glares back at him. "You're the one who told everyone, didn't you?"

My eyes are bulging as I stare at our mother in complete and utter shock. I can't believe something insane she's done is actually surprising me, but I really didn't expect this.

"They have a right to know who he is," she mumbles at us, fully serious.

"Who's they?" I gasp.

She turns to me. "Everyone. Cyrus, honey, he took advantage of you."

My brain is throbbing inside my skull. "You actually told people…? *You're* the fucking monster."

She makes a face at me like I'm out of line, but I just can't stop shaking my head, astonished.

"You're such a fucking psycho!" Colson roars in her face. "You put your own children at risk for attention??"

The giant bodyguards continue to hold him back by his arms while he seethes up at them, and the driver guy who's been stalking him all week, radiating pure rage. I've never seen my brother so angry before, and it's scaring the shit out of me… Mainly because I can feel it, too.

I feel it inside me, the wrath coating my tendons. I'm just as angry as Colson is, but mine is hidden beneath the surface.

Blinking while my blood simmers, I gaze at all these people judging us. And I finally get it…

Colson and I are the same. But he wears his emotions on his sleeve. And mine sinks down into my bones.

Colson looks out over the crowd around us, all of whom, are now silent and gawking. "Attention, fuckfaces. Listen up closely, I have an announcement to make."

My body finally jumpstarts back to life and I step forward. "Colson… what are you doing?"

“Don’t worry about it, Cy,” he whispers to me. “I’ve got this. I’m gonna tell the truth… like you should have been able to today… If they hadn’t taken it away from you.”

I blink at him, my heart thumping wildly behind my ribs. *He read my speech.…*

He knew I was going to come out to the whole school. I was *finally* going to be strong and say it, with zero fucks to give…

But that moment was taken from me by our mother.

“It was all me,” Colson shouts for everyone to hear. “*I* slept with Tauren Vance. I was consenting… Actually, if anything, I tricked him into it,” he breathes out and turns to Mom. “The video was actually me. I had dressed up like Cyrus. I was… pretending to be him.”

Mom looks thoroughly shocked, and even more disgusted than before.

“Cyrus had nothing to do with it,” my brother goes on. “If you want to punish someone, punish me. If you want someone to blame… a new juicy little morsel of gossip in this bullshit town… Well, here I am. Colson Becker… *the bad twin*.”

The air surrounding us is thick with tension. I’ve never actually *felt* silence before. I’m not looking at any of the assholes around us, but I just know they’re all looking at my brother like he’s a monster.

Whereas I’m looking at him like exactly what he is… *Everything*.

He’s not the villain, he’s *my* hero.

Colson peeks at me and gives me a subtle twist to his lips, before breaking himself free from the grip of the security guards and stomping away.

Turning to my mother, I grunt, “Happy fucking graduation, Mom. Since, you know, it’s all about you.”

Ignoring the eyes on me, I grab Paris by the arm, and I drag her with me.

Off to follow my brother, the selfless badass.

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TAUREN



My father was a famous producer on Broadway.

Wesley Tauren—my mother named me after him, but gave me her surname, *Vance*—was pretty famous in his day, producing plenty of famous shows in the eighties. He was a sort of *Manhattan icon*, if you will.

But like most, he held on tightly to his secrets.

Underneath the glitz and glamour of NYC has always been a seedy underbelly of depraved deviancies, and my father was a part of that. According to the press, he used to throw elaborate sex parties, and was actually a rather sought-after Dominant.

It's all fine, really. Whatever consenting adults do in the privacy of their own homes is their business.

Until it's not.

My father's ultimate downfall was like so many others in history… He fell in love. Except that just falling in love with one person wasn't good enough for *dear old daddy*. He had to fall in love with *two* people. More specifically, a seventeen-year-old girl and her also seventeen-year-old stepbrother.

Allegations surfaced, the parents of the kids found out, and the whole thing blew up, being that my father was much older than them—I believe it said he was thirty-eight at the time. Plus, he was also in a position of power. Wesley Tauren was never charged with anything, since seventeen is the age of consent in New York.

But he was certainly ostracized.

Thirty years ago, the story took over the papers for a while, which was how I learned of all this, years later when I decided to look him up for the first time.

Needless to say, I was thrown. And for a long time, I judged the fuck out of my father for what he'd done. I thought, *there's no way I would ever do something like that. There has to be a line, right?*

Between *good* and *bad*… A line that you're unwilling to cross, regardless of the temptation.

Sitting in the living room area of my penthouse suite at the Four Seasons, I stare out the window while remembering all these details. Things that have haunted me for many years… I understand now.

I get it.

Maybe my father was a bad man for falling in love with people much younger than him; for falling in love with people he wasn't supposed to love, based on the rules of society…

But bad people need love, too.

Checking my watch with a sigh, I pick up my phone to call my partners. When I unlock it, there are so many new messages and notifications, that for a second, I think I'm hallucinating. But I'm not.

What I wouldn't give for some good drugs right now, though…

My phone has been blowing up for days. Ever since Carla spilled the beans to her loud-mouthed friends about the videos of me and the boys, it's been a shitstorm raining directly on yours truly.

Paparazzi have been parked outside the hotel for days. I can't even go anywhere. I'm a shut-in. In a luxury hotel suite, but still. I've been trapped inside this room for two days without breaking out and I'm beginning to go a little stir-crazy.

Calling Scott's phone on FaceTime, I position mine in front of my face, balking at my overgrown stubble and the general look of melancholy I've been wearing, rather fashionably I might add, since I was kicked out of my house and ripped away from the only two people I give a damn about anymore. Maybe it's a good thing I haven't been able to go outside…

I'm not sure I'm great company right now, anyway.

"Hey, there he is!" Scott's face pops up in front of mine with a pleasant greeting. But when he sees me, his smile flips suddenly. "Damn, man. You're really playing the part, huh?"

I roll my eyes, which hurts my chest because it reminds me of Colson. “Funny. So… how was the meeting with the investors?”

Scott’s eyes shift away from the screen, and he looks uneasy. I immediately slump back in my chair. *Fuck me.…*

Brad pops onto the screen from the side. “Hey, buddy! How you holding up?”

“Stop dancing around it and just tell me…” I grunt, running my fingers over my eyes and up into my disheveled hair. “Are they pulling?”

“No,” Brad says assuredly. “No, no, nothing like that.”

A wave of relief rushes over me, and I exhale.

Until Scott adds, “Well, *something* like that…”

“Just… spit it out.” My head drops back on the couch.

“They’re concerned,” Brad says regretfully.

“Sure…” I chew on my lower lip.

Scott blurts out, “Lara thinks you should step down.”

“Bro! Come on,” Brad scolds him. “I thought we said we were going to ease him into it…”

“He told us to spit it out.” Scott shrugs.

“But it doesn’t matter!” Brad jumps back in, to me. “Because we told her there’s no way we’d ever—”

“She’s right,” I sigh.

That gets them both to shut up for a solid ten seconds.

“What are you saying?” Brad asks quietly.

Standing up, I wander over to the balcony door. Stepping outside into the warm air of this June evening, my eyes set on the waves of the ocean below.

“This company is our baby,” I tell them, my tone obviously reflective.

I’ve been thinking about this since Carla kicked me out. Honestly, I knew it was coming. It was only a matter of time until she revealed the secrets of why we split up, using it for more sympathy, with the courts, her friends, the public… Really anyone who will listen.

This is the show she’s been waiting for. After all, the *circus* that this scandal has already become makes Dustin’s arrest look like a child’s birthday party.

“We built it from nothing, and we really believe in what we’re doing,” I go on, glancing back at the screen. My partners’ faces are etched in hurt; distress, worry and regret. *And it’s all because of me.* “I won’t let anything

destroy what we've worked so hard for. Especially not my bullshit mistakes."

They're quiet again as they share a look.

"I don't want to run this company without you," Brad says firmly.

"Me neither," Scott adds.

I huff. "That's idiotic."

"Watch your mouth," Scott admonishes me teasingly, and I laugh.

It feels so fucking *good*. I don't think I've laughed in almost three weeks.

Scott grins, shaking his head. "I'm just saying, this company wouldn't be what it is without you."

"Yea, I know that." I nod, taking a seat on one of the chairs to watch the sunset. "But that doesn't mean it can't keep growing without me. Stepping down is the right thing to do. And I've done enough wrong things for one lifetime…"

"Dude, honestly… We get it," Brad says softly. "I mean, what you're going through. What made you do… what you did."

My brows zip together. "Really?"

"Yea." He starts shifting around a bit uncomfortably, eyes flicking to Scott, then down at the floor. "They say your thirties are when you really get to know yourself…"

I give him a puzzled look, picking up a glass of scotch I hadn't realized I left out here. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"We've been banging for months," Scott says casually, and the sip of warm scotch in my mouth flies out over the railing of the balcony in a real-life spit take.

Probably for the best. It has been sitting out here for a while.

"Jesus, man!" Brad scolds Scott again, shaking his head while scrubbing a hand over his face.

"Sorry! You can never just get to the damn point," Scott gripes.

"You have no finesse, is the thing…"

"Really? That's not what you said last night…"

What in the actual fuck?!

My coughing goes on for seconds while they continue bickering back and forth like an old married couple. They've always been like this, and now it's kind of making sense. Once I can breathe again, I glare at them over the screen.

“I’m sorry… you just said you two have been screwing each other for *months*?!” I’m blown the hell away right now. This is not at all what I expected from this conversation.

“Barely two months,” Brad corrects, and Scott elbows him. “And yea… we were trying to figure out if we should tell you…”

“We didn’t want to stress you out,” Scott adds.

“You were really going to keep this from me??” I gasp, offended. “You’re my best friends! We own a business together!” My head is spinning. I take another sip of the warm scotch.

“Well, you never told us about you and Jeremy Balfour.” Brad smirks, lifting an accusatory brow.

And the scotch comes flying out of my mouth. *Again.*

“How the fuck did you find out about that?” I whisper and cough, my eyes shifting around as if speaking his name will summon him.

God, I haven’t heard that name in twenty freaking years.

“We’re friends on Facebook.” Scott grins wickedly. “He just messaged me on Saturday night and told me you guys fooled around in college. He made me swear not to tell anyone… So naturally, I told everyone.”

Brad chuckles and smacks him on the arm. “He’s kidding.”

“Yea, I would hope so,” I scoff. I can’t stop shaking my head. I feel like one of those bobblehead dolls on someone’s dashboard.

“All we’re saying is that sexuality is fluid,” Scott says, peeking at Brad.

“Yea, and sometimes attraction comes out of nowhere,” he adds.

Despite the complete and utter befuddlement of this conversation, all I can see in my mind right now are the twins. *Colson and Cyrus*… the two men who came into my life and became something I never expected. Who transformed me from who I was trying like hell to be into who I *am*.

It wasn’t Jeremy Balfour, though he played a small part in it. It was them. *My boys.*

Who aren’t mine anymore.

Emotions flood my system, and I clear my throat. “So you don’t think I’m a… bad person?”

“Oh, you’re awful.” Brad grins and I chuckle. “Vance, it’s not that simple. Did you do something that’s considered wrong to some people? Yea, sure. But you’re a human being with feelings and emotions, and desires. I’m not sure there even *is* good, or a bad. It’s subjective.”

“You’re so wise,” Scott teases, and Brad gives him a look that makes me feel all squirmy.

“Okay, this is too weird.” I rake my fingers through my hair. “It’s fucking crazy seeing you two looking at each other like that.”

“Sorry.” Scott clears his throat. “One more awkward thing before I let you go…”

I cringe. “What now…?”

“Your twin boyfriends…” he whispers, locking eyes on mine over the screen, “are crazy hot.”

He cackles out loud while I blink at him in shock and horror, and Brad grins, shaking his head.

“How are you going to deal with him?” I ask Brad, and he shrugs.

“Look, man, we’re just boning.” He sighs, and Scott gives him a wounded look.

I get a notification that another call is coming in.

“I gotta go, guys,” I tell them. “It’s my lawyer.”

“Okay, call us tomorrow!” Brad says.

“And you’re not stepping down!” Scott yells.

My head is *still* spinning while I disconnect from them and answer the new call, which isn’t FaceTime, since my lawyer doesn’t mess with that stuff. “Larry. Talk to me.”

“Are you sitting down?”

My stomach knots and I swallow. “What now…?”

“I heard from someone at Leonard’s office that Carla is talking about selling the video.”

His voice echoes in my mind as the world around me spins. I’m whirling and whirling, gripping the arm of the chair to keep myself upright.

“Is she fucking psychotic??” I croak, blinking over the terror and rage now fogging up my vision.

“That’s something you would need to tell me, bud,” my lawyer sighs. “But judging by current events, and the fact that I heard she showed it to her friends when she first saw it, I would go ahead and nod enthusiastically to that question.”

“It’s her fucking *son*,” I grunt with bile rising and fury setting my jaw. “What is she trying to accomplish with this bullshit?”

“I’m not sure,” he replies stoically. “I don’t know if you’ve looked at any of the social media shit Felicity’s been sending us, but apparently there

was an incident at their graduation…”

My chest is so tight with agony and anguish for what the twins are dealing with, it feels like I might split open at any moment.

“I haven’t looked at anything,” I breathe, purely exhausted. I just want to lie down and die. “I don’t want to know what a million strangers are saying about me…”

“That’s good,” Larry says. “You shouldn’t. As far as the divorce goes, papers have already been filed, and now it’s only a matter of time.” He pauses for a moment. “I bet you’re glad I had you include that special infidelity clause, hm?”

I nod slowly, though he can’t see me. “Yea, Larry. You’re a genius. You somehow anticipated that I would epically fuck up, and now I won’t have to fork over every dime I have to this raving lunatic I married…” My voice trails and I squint. “That’s probably why she’s pulling this shit with the video. She’s pissed that she won’t be able to take me for a ride.”

“It’s a strong possibility.”

“Well then, fuck it. I’ll buy the video from her.” Larry is quiet on the other end. “I’m serious, Larry. I’ll pay whatever she wants as long as I get every fucking copy so we can destroy them.”

He makes a grumbly noise into the phone. It’s not necessarily an agreement with my plan, but at least he’s acknowledging it.

“See what you can do.”

“Alright,” he mutters. “Have you decided what you’re going to do about Knight-Life?”

“Same thing.” I stand up and step up to the railing of the balcony. “I’m going to give up whatever I have to so that no one else has to suffer for my choices.”

Larry rumbles once more into the phone before we say our goodbyes and hang up. And I spend the next hour just staring out at the ocean.

Thinking about my father and what he did, Carla and the mess she’s making out of my messes. I think about my best friends, and Jeremy Balfour… About Colson and Cyrus.

I think for hours about heroes and villains. And the vast space in between.



A PERSISTENT KNOCK at my hotel door wakes me up.

Blinking groggily at the clock on the nightstand, I find that it's almost three in the morning. *Who would be knocking at this hour?*

Eager butterflies swarm my gut as I stumble out of bed, rushing through the suite to the door while the knocking continues.

My heart is in my throat as I peek through the peephole.

Oh my God…

I whip open the door fast to reveal a tall being dressed in all black. His hood is up, covering most of his black hair, while the pale complexion and green eyes shimmer at me from underneath, hypnotizing me instantly.

"You're here," I whisper, sounding like a total moron.

He smiles. And I know right away that it's Colson. I'm still not even sure how, but I just know. It's as if his smiles are so coveted that when he really throws one at you, it's almost blinding.

Snapping out of it, I glance up the hall before grabbing him quickly by the arm and tugging him inside. He stumbles into me while I carefully close the door behind him. And as soon as it's shut, I pull him into my arms, holding him so tight I run the risk of snapping his bones.

He melts into me on a breath, burrowing his face in the crook of my neck. His long arms circle my waist as my hand comes up to the back of his hooded head, clutching him for dear life.

"You're here…" I hum again, and he nods, his scent surrounding me. My mouth is watering at the smell that's so sweet and masculine and specific to him, I didn't even know how much I missed it until it was swarming my senses once more.

Pulling his face back so I can look at him, I feel like I'm in a dream… since it's the only place I see them anymore.

I can't even believe he's really here.

"Where's your brother? Is he okay?" I ask, sudden nerves working their way up.

Until he replies in that deliciously raspy grunge singer voice he possesses. "He's fine. He'll be here soon. We couldn't risk being seen

coming here together. The goddamn paparazzi leeches have been following us around."

"Col, I'm so sorry," I sigh, just overflowing with remorse.

"Shut up please, Tauren." He grins and I can't help how it makes me smile back. "I didn't come here to talk about serious shit."

"You didn't?" Our eyes hold one another's while he shakes his head slowly. Just having him here, *physically* in front of me again…

I've been empty since I left him and Cyrus. *And now I'm full once more.*

Lowering the hood from his head, I comb my fingers through the silky strands of his obsidian hair. "You snuck in to see me?"

He gazes up at me, and I hate that I can tell how exhausted he is from the dark circles under his eyes. He bites his lip. "I missed you… *We* did."

My fingers trail his jaw, my thumb sliding over his plump lip. "You have no idea how badly I've missed you, baby."

I can't hold out for one more second. Pushing him against the door, my mouth lowers over his and I kiss him, tender enough, but still harsh in my overwhelming need that's been building up over the past weeks. Colson gasps into my mouth and I growl back, pinning him to the door with my hips while I bruise his lips with mine.

"Open up," I command, breathless already. "Let me taste you. I'm jonesing for it, love."

"Uhhmm, Tauren," he whines, parting his lips for me to give him my tongue.

His greedy fingertips trail the lines of my exposed torso while I lick and suck and bite him with as much fervor as I possess. I know I should calm down, but I *can't.*

I've missed him way too much. Both of them.

Having them and then losing them so fast was like sprouting another limb, only to immediately chop it off. We only just got started when they were ripped away from me. *I need more.*

We're kissing so hard my lips are already swollen, my tongue raw with the need to spend hours licking him everywhere. The only sounds are our collective pants and grunts, and of course my raging pulse pounding in my ears. My dick is stiff in my sweats, hard and unrelenting like a metal pole. Pushing my hips forward, I grind it on him, feeling his own erection as it throbs on mine through our clothes

“I think about you every night.” Colson’s voice shakes with his confession in between the salacious wet suction.

“Mmm… do you, gorgeous?” I force my lips away from his to trail his chin, then his jaw.

“Yea,” he groans, cupping my pecs in his big hands, thumbs circling my nipples until I’m shivering. “When I’m all alone in my bed…”

“What do you do to yourself when you’re thinking about me?” I lick and suck down his throat, finding his pulse and biting down on it enough that he trembles. “Tell me, my sweet thing. Tell me what you do when you’re wishing I was in that bed with you.”

He lets out a breathy moan, rubbing himself vigorously on me, chasing the friction on his hard cock and aching balls. “Well… First, I get naked.”

“Mm, I like it already.” I grin on his sweet, milky flesh. “Keep going.”

“Then, I spread my legs wide,” he whispers, and my cock leaps. From the pictures he’s concocting in my imagination, yes, but also from the perfectly luscious sound of his voice; like Pop Rocks in milk chocolate, smooth and gravelly at the same time. “Like you would.”

“I love having you spread open for me.” I suck the words onto his neck, and he rumbles.

“I know. And then, I suck on my fingers, get them all wet… And I slide them between my ass.”

“Fuck, *Colson*…” I breathe, running my hand down to his erection, because I just can’t not touch it.

He purrs. “Mmm… and I… I tease myself.”

“Where?” I grunt. “Where do you tease yourself?”

“My… ass,” he stutters a bit. I pull back to look at him, to watch his cheeks blushing from the humiliation of what he’s confessing. I fucking *love* it. “I tease my asshole and pretend it’s your finger… or your tongue.” I growl, lashing his lower lip with my tongue. “Or your cock.”

My other hand covers his hand on my chest, my index finger trailing his. “This is nowhere near big enough to be my cock, baby doll.”

His eyelids droop as he releases a lazy grin, shifting his hips forward to push his dick into my other hand. “I know. But I have to pretend, because I haven’t had that giant inside me in weeks and I’m craving it.”

My mouth brushes over his. “You’ve been craving my big cock in your tight little cunt, haven’t you?”

He shudders and arches up to me. “Yes, Tauren. Yes, yes, please, I need it. I never knew I needed it until I had yours and now it’s all I can think about.”

“Baby, you can have my cock in you, I promise,” I rasp while my hand squeezes him, jerking slowly through his pants. “I’ll give it to you so hard you won’t be able to walk right for a week.”

“God, fuck me, Tauren…” He gasps.

“And what about your brother?” I ask him while he writhes into me. “Have you been taking care of him while I’m gone?”

He whines again. “I *can’t*. Carla won’t let me anywhere near him.”

The reality of the situation smacks me in the face and my hand stops moving while I peer down at him.

But before I can even say anything, he grunts, “Tauren, stop. I know you’re about to start apologizing again and I don’t want to hear it. If you don’t want me blaming myself for this shit, which I know you don’t, then you don’t get to do it either.”

He gives me this snarky little brow raise as he gazes up at me, and I swear to God, it would take a damn bulldozer to wipe this smile off my face right now.

“You’re such a frustrating little thing, you know that?” I take his hand that’s on mine and bring it down to my crotch. Watching his pupils dilate is unlike anything I could ever imagine. “I think I know what you need, sweet thing.”

His fingers curl around the shape of my cock through my sweatpants as he licks his lip. “Anything, Tauren. I’ll take literally *anything* you want to give me.”

My soul ignites at those words. The completeness of exactly who I am and what I want folds over me like the biggest wave.

Leaning over his mouth, I sigh, “*Good* boy.” Then I back up a step, pinning him with a firm look. “When is Cyrus coming?”

“He should be here any minute,” he tells me, fidgeting in his state of arousal.

“Good. I want you naked and on your knees in the bedroom when he arrives.” I blink at him, remaining fully serious while his chest pulses. I nod toward the bedroom. “Go now, please.”

“Yes, sir.” And he’s already unzipping his hoodie while he darts toward the bedroom of the suite.

I have to smirk at how eager he is. It's fucking sexy as hell. I used to think Cyrus was the one who really needed me to run him down with every one of my wicked desires, but it turns out Colson is just as greedy for it.

But the thing that's most amazing is so am I. I'm *desperate* to race in there right now, pick him up and throw him down the bed. Spread his legs open and fuck him raw for hours.

We opened Pandora's box that weekend, and I've been itching for more ever since. But I have to be patient.

It's half the fun, after all. Making them wait. Watching them squirm.

My excitement is at an all-time high. I'm still more than a novice at this stuff, so I need to make sure I pace myself. I've been stuffing down my control freak side for so long, it still feels foreign to let him out of his cage.

Practice makes perfect, though. So rather than running into that bedroom and attacking Colson, showering him with pain and pleasure until he crests into waves of orgasms, I force myself to take a breath and go to the minibar. I have some water, and then pour myself a scotch and stand there, drinking and tapping my fingers.

I'm antsy as hell. *I can't wait to see Cyrus…*

Obviously, I haven't seen either of them since the day I left, but Cyrus called me last week, and just hearing his sad, worried voice tore me to shreds. I've been holding onto so much guilt over what's happened. And now that the paparazzi are stalking them, this apparent issue at graduation… I don't know what happened because I refuse to go online or check the many, *many* emails my assistant has been sending me. Still, I'm sure whatever happened was anything but good.

And of course, none of that is necessarily *my* fault. All Carla had to do was keep her mouth shut and wait for the divorce. Or maybe it is my fault. I should've known she'd milk this for everything she could. She doesn't care about her boys, which is so devastating to think about. They deserve all the love in the world.

My rampant thoughts are cut off by a soft knock on the door. I can't help but smile as I walk to answer it. Even his knock is gentle. So different from his brother, but perfect all the same. They both are.

Their imperfections make them infinitely spectacular.

I open the door slowly, and a sigh leaves me at the sight of him. Wearing a dark blue sweatshirt, hood up the way Colson's was, obviously in an attempt to sneak in undetected.

“My heart is whole again,” I whisper and pull him inside.

Cyrus is practically convulsing he’s shivering so hard while I close the door and the distance between us. In the blink of an eye, my lips are on his, and it’s deep, passionate. We’re molding ourselves together, inhaling and exhaling one another to keep us *alive*.

“Tauren,” he whimpers into my mouth, and I devour the flavor of my name on his lips.

“Mmm… *Cyrus*.”

“I just… I missed you. So much,” he breathes while I hold his face and he grips my shoulders. And I kiss him and pin him so hard, he’s practically part of the door. “So so much.”

I have to break the kiss to look at him. *I just have to.* Gazing into his eyes, like sparkling teal waters, I’m lost to him. To both of them.

I don’t want to let them go.

I want to keep them forever.

“I miss you so much too,” is all I can whisper while my head spins and my heart thumps, and I consider how strong these feelings have already become. It’s ridiculous.

But I *need* it.

I peck him once more on his sweet, trembling lips before I take him by the hand. “Come on.”

I drag him along through the suite like a distracted puppy on a leash while his head bobs all around.

“This place is nice,” he says, and I peek at him over my shoulder.

“God, I fucking missed you.” My grin is unrelenting, and his smile is everything I’ve been missing for two weeks on this desolate island without *my boys*.

As soon as we step inside the bedroom of my suite, our eyes fall to the sexiest goddamn sight in the world. A naked Colson on his knees, chewing on his bottom lip like candy.

I’m gonna need to bite that lip myself in a minute.

My eyes take in every inch of Colson, my balls throbbing between my thighs as I elbow Cyrus.

“Can I point something out to you?” I ask him softly while we both stare at Colson, and he up at us.

“You could try…” Cyrus mumbles, wiping literal drool from his mouth.

I chuckle softly. “Do you see how hard he is?” I nod at Colson, gazing hungrily at his erection. It’s standing up firm, poking him in the stomach while he kneels.

Colson glances down at his dick, his face flushing like crazy, visible even in the dimly lit room.

“That’s how much he loves being on his knees for me,” I tell Cyrus quietly. “How much he craves being obedient for me. Why do you think he loves it so much?”

Cyrus is quiet for a moment, watching his brother closely while they have one of their wordless twin conversations.

“He doesn’t fall in line in regular life,” Cyrus says. “But he secretly loves it. He craves the order when everything else feels out of control.”

Colson’s eyes are rounded, sparkling up at us from the floor.

I nod slowly. “I think you’re right. And that’s why I realized he needs praise. Because he doesn’t get it enough.” I tilt my face to Cyrus. “And you need to be hurt… Punished a little.”

I witness the mound in his throat bob before he nods. “Yes, please.”

My lips curve. Then I look back to Colson. “Come.”

Immediately, Colson begins crawling to me. On his hands and knees, completely naked, he looks like a sinful dream; pale flesh sprinkled in ink, black nails and tousled black hair. His eyes are more severe than Cyrus’s. More intense. I think that’s one of those differences no one probably ever notices. But I can see it clearly. Especially from up here.

He reaches me and sits back on his knees again, peering up with his lips parted and chest moving through rapid breaths. I reach down and cup his jaw, treasuring him with my fingers.

“Good boy,” I rumble, brushing his hair back. His eyes close and he leans into my touch. I can see how much he’s needed this. The touch he desires that he never gets. The praise he thirsts for so deeply. “Cyrus, get undressed and lie on the bed, please.”

He does as I say, removing his clothes and lying down while I pet Colson’s head. Reaching inside my pants, I pull out my cock, which is so hard it’s stretched and glistening at the tip.

“My balls, baby,” I murmur to Colson. “Like that first night in my office.”

He brings his warm mouth to my nuts, nuzzling them first before flattening his tongue and cradling them gently. A brush of air leaves my lips

while he sucks them into his mouth, licking and kissing and praising my balls like such a wickedly perfect thing.

This kid is a dream come fucking true.

When I glance at Cyrus, he's on his back, watching us with wide eyes and his cock pulsing and leaking all over his belly button.

"Look at your brother," I say to Colson, and he pauses his worshipping of my nuts to peek at Cyrus. "He's making a mess. Go clean it up."

Colson crawls over to the bed and climbs on top of Cyrus, lowering his mouth to lap up all the precum on his abs.

"Fuckyesss," Cyrus whines.

"You," I hiss at him and his face flicks to mine, cheeks as pink as rose petals. "We're gonna stuff that mouth full again to keep you quiet." He bites his lip, eyes shimmering with so much desire he looks drunk. Kneeling on the bed beside them, I pick up Cyrus's boxer briefs. "Arms above your head."

Cyrus lifts both of his long arms, wrists together like a perfect toy. I use his boxers to fasten his wrists together, then tell him, "Keep them up until I tell you. Understand?"

"Yes, Sir," he breathes, voice low and hoarse while Colson continues to suck on the head of his dick like a lollipop.

"Here's what I want." They both look up at me. "Colson, I want to watch you fuck your brother's tight little ass. But I'm not giving you any lubrication. So you'll need to get him nice and wet, okay?"

Colson nods fast, glancing down at Cyrus. The way they're looking at each other is so intense. I can tell they've been craving this too. They're incomplete without each other, so being able to put them back together right now is everything I need.

"Are you ready for my cock again, good twin?" Colson murmurs over Cyrus's mouth.

"I've been ready for it ever since the first time you gave it to me," he sighs.

Leaning over to Colson, I whisper, "Kiss him first."

Colson hums as his lips meet his brother's. Watching them kiss is unlike anything my lascivious thoughts could whip up. It's like that day in my office, only this time we've all succumbed to what we want from each other, and what we can give one another. There are no restrictions, at least not any I care about.

Which brings my thoughts briefly to the date…

My eyes widen, and I sit back. “It’s your birthday…?”

Their eyes meet mine and they both grin, lips still together. Colson’s tongue moves into Cyrus’s mouth, and he sucks it.

Fuck. Yes.

“Wow.” I’m blown away. “You came to celebrate being officially legal with me?”

“Mhmm…” Colson hums, grinding himself into Cyrus.

“Oh… we’re going to celebrate alright.” My devious mind is winding up with ideas while they both shiver, making out more fervently with every lick and suck and nibble. My hand reaches out to brush their soft skin as I whisper, “*Double trouble*.”

They both chuckle while Colson moves his kisses down Cyrus’s jaw and throat, trailing down the curves of muscle in his brother’s torso. He licks Cy’s nipple, sucking and flicking it, before moving over to the other.

“Colson,” I call him, and he looks up. “Teeth.”

He nods and bites down on Cyrus’s peaked flesh. It doesn’t look too hard, but enough for Cyrus to flinch and moan. Colson soothes the spot with his tongue, then bites again, tenderly nipping and tugging at it until Cyrus cries softly.

“Good boy, sweet.” I run my fingers along Colson’s back.

“So good…” Cyrus’s eyes roll back, and I have to rub my erection briefly because I’m about to lose it. *I need something soon or I might collapse.*

Colson moves lower, licking the lines in Cy’s pelvis before giving his long dick some praise from his soft lips. He kisses the shaft of Cyrus’s erection, and it bobs, like it wants to jump up into his mouth. He chuckles, breathlessly devious.

But he leaves it bereft of any more attention and continues his path of kisses down to Cy’s balls, grabbing his thighs and forcing his legs open wider, spreading him apart.

“Fffuck,” Cyrus whimpers while Colson trails his lips on Cy’s inner thighs.

“I’ve never done this before…” Colson mumbles to himself, before sneaking his tongue between his brother’s cheeks.

“Looks like you’re doing perfect already, beautiful,” I whisper, watching on with eager eyes as he licks circles around Cyrus’s rim, before

pushing his whole mouth in there to kiss and suck. “Remember, you gotta get him *really* wet, baby. Otherwise, you’ll hurt him when you fuck that sweet hole.”

“I want… hurt…” Cyrus chokes out words while his lips shiver and his eyes roll back.

I can’t help but chuckle. “I know you do, precious. Here.” I take my cock out of my pants and move up to his face. “Suck for me.”

He turns his face and I shove my dick into his mouth without further warning. He grunts around it, but immediately begins sucking like such a…

“Good boy,” I mumble to both of them, fighting to keep my wits about me.

But I mean, really… *Whose life is this?*

A threesome with eighteen-year-old twins??

I think I’ve died and gone to gay baby-Dom heaven.

Colson is really going to town on Cyrus’s ass, taking his directions very seriously, which has me praising him all the while, whispering, *Good job, love. Keep going. Stuff your tongue in there. Perfect, my sweet thing. Fuck, you look so good eating his ass out.* My fingers touch him all over, rubbing his shoulders and neck and back, gripping his hair and stuffing him deeper between his brother’s legs.

“Mmmffm,” Cyrus rumbles on my cock, sucking slowly while he quivers on the bed.

Adjusting my stance, I kneel over his face and feed my cock down his throat, *deep*. “Feel this cock on your tonsils, little slut?”

Colson pulls his face up and wipes his mouth. “I think he’s gonna come if you keep that up.” I glare at him, and he smirks. “Sir.”

I give Cyrus one more pump, loving the sight of my balls on his face while he chokes on my dick, before pulling out. He gasps for air, but immediately arches up, squirming like he misses it. The discomfort.

“You are such a gorgeous, naughty little thing.” I stare down at him with appreciation in my eyes. Zealous lust and protection and…

Love?

I shake that off quickly and move over to Colson. “Let’s see how wet that hole is.”

Inspecting it, I find a river of saliva between Colson’s mouth and Cyrus’s asshole, so it’s safe to say he’s probably good to go. I have a small

bottle of lotion next to the bed, if need be, but I don't intend on giving it to him. *He'll be fine.*

Sitting back, I give Colson a look. And he sucks in a deep pull of air, positioning himself over Cyrus, their cocks resting together.

"I can't wait to feel you inside me again, B," Cyrus purrs.

Colson grabs his dick in his hand, spitting into his palm to rub it on his inches. "Not a day has passed since that night when I haven't wanted to sink inside you again."

He presses the head of his cock up to Cyrus's hole, kissing him softly while Cyrus breathes, "Our honeymoon?"

Colson grins and nods. "Our honeymoon."

And then he nudges his way inside.

Cyrus immediately groans out loud, but then bites his lip to keep quiet. Colson's eyes remain locked on his brother's while he sinks deeper, forcing his way inside with only limited lubrication. But it works. Especially when he whispers, "Let me in deeper, G. I need you to take every swollen inch."

"Give me every inch." Cyrus's lashes flutter and he groans, wrapping his legs around Colson's waist while Colson plunges himself deep, forceful and rough, until he's balls deep.

It's hard for me to see it exactly from this angle, but it doesn't matter. Just watching them together is magnificent. Identical in almost every single way, breathing each other in and out, their long limbs and taut muscles straining while they fuck, sensually slow and desperately hard.

"You two look incredible," I growl. "Fuck harder. Wear him like he's yours, baby."

Colson's thrusts pick up while he holds Cyrus's throat and ruts into him, fucking in and out rough. Watching Cyrus's stomach clench and his dick throb is driving me absolutely insane. The precum dripping from his cock on every deep thrust… It's winding me up.

Colson reaches down and fists Cyrus's cock. "You feel so fucking good, baby." He drops his forehead to Cyrus's and Cy whimpers.

"I don't w-want to… come yet."

"Don't come, gorgeous. You can hold out. For me?"

Cyrus nods fast.

Okay, I need to fuck something before I die.

Rolling off the bed, I go for the lotion on the nightstand. Stepping out of my pants fully, I move around to the bottom of the bed, standing directly

behind Colson.

He turns his face to look up at me, cheeks flushed and eyes alit with a cosmos of need. “Oh God, tell me you’re gonna put that inside me. I’m not kidding, Tauren, I need it so bad.”

Leaning over him, I press kisses on his spine while he pumps slowly into Cyrus beneath him. “My good boy gets what he wants.”

Lubing up my cock, I grab his ass forcefully and spread him open. Pushing the crown up to his hole, I let out a breath. And then I surge into him.

Colson’s voice snaps, a groan turning to a hoarse *fuck yess,* as I feed him inch after inch of my aching dick, holding his cheeks open so I can watch myself stretching him.

“Jesus Christ, this is the best thing I’ve ever seen,” I rumble, pressing my pelvis up to his ass when I make it all the way in.

“It’s the best thing… I’ve ever… *felt,*” he gasps, breaths labored. “Your cock is… *fuck,* it’s so long. Deep deep deep.”

“Keep moving, baby,” I hiss at him while I pull myself back, then push in. “Fuck him with my thrusts.”

“Oh *God* yea, right there,” Colson rumbles.

I kiss the back of his neck, giving him a tiny bite. “Focus, sweet.”

“Yes, Sir.” He shivers. He holds Cyrus’s arms, which are still stretched above his head while he drives in and sweeps back while I do the same into him.

I grip Colson’s hips so hard I can almost see the bruises now, fucking him in rippling motions that have me going out of my mind. In and out, in… and out… All the while watching my cock breaking him in while he plays the middle of the sandwich, grinding into Cyrus, with Cy’s dick between them.

The sounds inside this room are beyond salacious. Animalistic grunts and purrs and whimpers, hoarse voices singing different variations of the same song; *more, harder, fuck me so good.*

When Cyrus whines, that he can’t hold on, I grab Colson by the throat and straighten him up so that his back is flush to my chest.

He swallows, his Adam’s apple moving against my palm as I whisper in his ear, “I wanna try something.”

“I wanna try *everything*.” He leans into me.

“Me too,” Cyrus says. “As long as I get to come.”

I grin while I kiss Colson’s neck. “Oh, you’ll come, precious. Probably almost instantly.”

“’Kay,” he sighs. “Well, Colson better get out of me right now, then. Because I’m gonna bust.”

“No, he stays right where he is.” I tap him on the hip and pull out of Colson’s tight, warm ass, watching every inch of my dick while it slides out. Then I stand up. “Cyrus, I want you on top.”

Colson rolls over, flipping Cyrus on top of him in one swift movement. They both let out breathless chuckles while Cy gets seated on top of his brother, hands still trussed up in his boxers resting on Colson’s pecs.

Moving up behind him, I press a gentle kiss behind his ear, and he shudders. “You want us both inside you at the same time, my bad little slut?”

Cyrus’s head drops forward, his eyes fluttering closed while he mewls and nods. “Yes. Yes yes.”

“Does that work?” Colson peers up at us both, green eyes shimmering intrigue.

Cyrus turns to me and scoffs, “This one’s new at bottoming.” I grin and he chuckles.

Colson rolls his eyes. “You’ve only had sex twice before tonight, know-it-all.”

“Yea, well, I watch a lot of porn,” Cyrus retorts.

“Boys,” I reprimand them, and they both go quiet, eyes locking on me for further instruction.

Squirting more lotion onto my cock, then onto my fingers, I bring them to Cyrus’s ass, massaging lubricant onto where Colson is currently filling him up with dick.

“God, that feels awesome,” Colson whines.

“Just wait until I get in there and start moving,” I tell him, then whisper to Cyrus, “Relax for me, baby.” I press a finger inside him, with Colson’s dick, and he hums. “Good job. That feel good?”

He nods fast. “Yes. I like it… a lot.”

“Good.” I push in a second finger, and he moans.

“Holy fuck,” Colson croaks.

Moving my fingers in and out, I watch with wide eyes. It’s the most insane thing I’ve ever witnessed. I know he needs to be properly primed,

but I also know I need to do this now before I come just from *thinking about* it.

Feeding in a third finger, Cyrus whimpers, his ass stretching around Colson's cock and my digits. I keep them there for a few moments, allowing him to adjust, until he starts to squirm, and then I pull them out. He releases a long breath.

"You good, precious?" I whisper into his ear while rubbing his chest gently.

"Yea. *So* good." Cyrus turns, locking his eyes on mine.

I kiss his lips, then I take my cock in my hand, aiming the head up to him. "Remember, stay relaxed for me."

"Y-yes, Sir…" His voice quivers as I nudge my cock into him, forcing it inside the tight spot that's already so full.

It doesn't take immediately. There are several intense moments of build-up while I nudge and push, gently, while whispering to him. *Good, baby. Just like that. Relax and let me in this beautiful, warm place.*

Eventually, the head slips in, and Cyrus chokes out the word *fuck*, trying to fall forward onto Colson. But I hold him up in the best position, driving in deeper.

"God fucking… holy… shit…" He gasps, his muscles limp in my arms.

It's good. It means he's relaxed enough that I can move in him.

"You feel my cock, Col?" I ask, peering down at Colson while his eyes roll back.

"Yea… *Jesus*, this is incredible. I'm gonna come…"

I huff a laugh, pumping in and out as slowly as possible, stroking myself in Cyrus's tight ass, right on top of Colson's dick. It feels like my entire body could burst into a confetti bomb at any moment. Nothing has *ever* felt this *fan-fucking-tastic.*

"Baby, take these two big cocks," I growl at Cyrus, holding him up while I move in and out of him and Colson arches beneath us. "You love being stuffed with dick, don't you?"

"Yes yes yes," he cries, falling to pieces in my arms. "I'm gonna *come*."

"Me too," Colson croaks, unable to hold it for one more second. "Oh fuck, oh God. I'm coming in you. Tauren, my cum is… on your… cock. *Yesss*."

"Mmm it is, baby. Give it to us." I keep moving, fucking him through his contractions with my dick on his, surrounded by the tightest grip of

Cyrus's ass.

I can feel *everything*; Colson's big dick pulsing while he fills Cyrus with cum. I watch with the hungriest eyes as it drips down all over us.

"I'm coming!" Cyrus sobs, and his dick uncontrollably shoots all over Colson's chest.

"Col, milk it out of him, baby."

Colson wraps a fist around Cyrus's dick and strokes while he erupts, watching on with hooded eyes as streams of cum shoot out on his heaving chest.

"Fuck yes," Cyrus trembles all over, his throaty voice singing filthy words. "Come in me, *please*, Tauren. Flood me… I need both of you… inside… *fuck*."

"Anything for you, baby." I bite down on his shoulder while I pump into him, only two more times before I crack right down the middle.

The orgasm is so intense, like being swept under water. I feel like I'm riding the biggest wave known to man as my dick bursts and my cum flows inside Cyrus. It fills him up, then seeps out everywhere, mixing with Colson's while I gasp for air.

"Holy motherfucking fuck," I gasp, then cough.

Colson snorts out loud, then Cyrus chuckles, falling down on him.

"Ow! God…" He wiggles his butt.

"Baby, hold still," I grunt, pulling out of him.

"Lord have mercy," Cyrus whines and I kiss all over his neck and shoulders.

"You did so fucking well, love. That was amazing for a first time," I tell him, and he purrs like a happy kitten.

"That was fucking insane." Colson sighs sleepily as I lift Cyrus off of his cock, depositing him down on the bed.

"Do we want to shower now?" I ask them, rubbing their long limbs, massaging their sore muscles. When I don't get an answer, I ask, "Boys?" But all I get are snores.

I have to laugh. I really want to stay here in bed with them, but I need to clean them up first. So I reluctantly pry myself away and stumble out of bed on shaky legs, going to the bathroom for some warm washcloths.

Coming back, I clean them both up, admiring how *right* this feels. If I thought what we did before felt right, then this is an entirely new version of it. Fucking and taking care of them… It's all I want in the whole world. To

endlessly treasure them for being the two imperfect souls who showed me just how perfect the wrong thing could be.

Once they're cleaned up enough, I climb into bed with them, snuggling up in between their warm bodies and covering us all with a comforter. They immediately sleepily nestle up to me, resting their heads on me while I touch their surfaces and just feel it.

The bliss that comes from being unapologetically *bad*.

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COLSON



One day when we were twelve, Petra took us to the Santa Monica Pier.

We'd obviously been there before. Not often, since it's a couple of hours in the car, and theoretically Solana offers a lot of the same things you can find in Santa Monica. *Except for one…*

The Pacific Park Ferris Wheel.

Cyrus has never been much of a fan of carnival rides, but when we were little, we both realized how cool Ferris wheels are. Being that high up, in a rickety old seat that wobbles around while you look down at the rest of the world… *What's not to love?* I used to go to amusement parks with my friends. Ride roller coasters and scream like crazy because I love the adrenaline. But Ferris wheels were me and Cy's thing.

Leave it to him to find the most relaxing ride possible and fall in love with it.

We hadn't been to Santa Monica in almost two years at that point. We had no plans to go, either. It was January, so it wasn't exactly prime pier weather. But Petra had slid into the living room where Cyrus and I were watching TV at a high volume to drown out Mom and Dad fighting and suggested we go.

I remember it vividly. Mom screaming at Dad about him *sticking his dick in someone*. The words seemed to echo louder than the rest, bouncing off every wall in our huge house. They'd been shouting for a while, but when I heard Cyrus's name, my fists balled instantly.

Trust me, Dustin, you don't want me to leave. Because if I do, I'm taking Cyrus and leaving you with the other one.

My jaw tightened while I swallowed over and over, desperately trying to gulp down the nasty emotions that wanted to come up. I could feel Cyrus watching me from the other side of the couch, but I refused to look at him. I refused to look away from the TV, an episode of *Game of Thrones* we weren't supposed to be watching serving as the ultimate distraction.

I remember wishing I had a dragon who could breathe fire all over this house—this whole *town*—and kill everyone while Cyrus and I sat up on its back and laughed.

That was when Petra crept into the room quietly. She showed us a smile that was obviously forced to keep us calm and asked, "You guys want to go for a ride?"

A glass smashed from somewhere up the hall, and we all flinched.

Cyrus and I had glanced at each other, then back at Petra. And we both nodded enthusiastically.

When we arrived at the Santa Monica Pier, it was like a ghost town. This pleased me, and I smiled, because I wasn't in the mood to deal with people, but mainly since I knew Cyrus didn't like crowds and I was always happier when he was happy.

Still am.

Petra mumbled something about sticking together, but I wasn't listening. My eyes were stuck on the giant Ferris wheel at the end. Grabbing my brother's hand, I dragged him with me over to it. The sun was just about to set, and something about the idea of watching the view from up there excited me.

Maybe from up there, I could look down on all the bullshit and it wouldn't seem so bad. *Like flying through the sky on Drogon's back.*

I handed the guy money and yanked my brother into one of the seats, where we both crashed on our butts, grinning up a storm. We were the only ones on the thing, so the guy started it up right away, and before I could even really shake the seat around and scare the shit out of my brother, we were up at the top.

Paused, suspended in the air, I looked down at the ocean, and the few people wandering around the pier. The cool breeze brushed through my hair, and I closed my eyes, pulling it into my lungs. And just like that, the anger and worry I always felt clouding up my head seemed to evaporate; it had vanished, swirling up and away like a puff of warm breath in the cold.

The sounds of Mom and Dad screaming at each other, their painful words, they were all gone. My brain was *clear*. And I wondered if it could always feel like this…

I wondered if I could permanently turn off my thoughts.

At that moment, warm fingers slid over mine. It startled me so much I nearly jumped out of my skin. My face flung in my brother's direction.

He wasn't looking at me. He was peering over the edge. But his fingers were sort of gripping mine.

I swallowed a heavy gulp, wondering if I should pull my hand away. We were *boys*. And brothers. *Boys aren't supposed to hold hands… especially not with their brothers.*

But then I slid my fingers through his, lacing them together. Because fuck what you're *supposed* to do.

Cyrus peeked at me, and his cheeks were pink. We stared at each other for a few quiet seconds of nothing but breeze and sunset.

"I'm sorry…" he whispered. I gave him a puzzled look. "About what Mom said."

Blinking at him, my head shook. "Don't apologize for her, or him. They don't know shit, anyway."

He grinned and nodded. "Yea. Fuck 'em."

A laugh burst out of me. I'd never heard Cyrus curse like that. Usually, I was the one with the *sailor mouth*, as Petra would say.

He was smiling so wide, so clearly proud of himself for being brazen. Or for making me laugh.

"Fuck 'em," I agreed. "It's you and me, brother. Ride or die."

I lifted our joined hands in the air, then raised my free hand as well, using it to flip my middle finger down at everyone below.

Cyrus chuckled and did the same. We kept our birds in the air, holding hands for the world to see. Not that anyone was really around, or that they cared. But it wasn't about that. It was about *us*, agreeing that no matter what comes or goes in this world, the two of us are permanent.

And anyone who has a problem with that can fuck right off.

"Fuck you!" I screamed out loud as the Ferris wheel began to move again.

Laughing hysterically, Cyrus shouted, "Fuck you!"

And we both began cackling like lunatics, screaming *fuck you* over and over, while the Ferris wheel spun down and back up. Petra's face was one

of pure mortification, which made us laugh even harder.

That memory is sitting in my mind as my eyes flutter open. The warmth from Cyrus's hand is all over my body this time. The calm clarity I'd felt is enveloping me like a bubble of serenity, even as I glance around the unfamiliar location.

Curling my face, I peer up and blink.

Oh, that's right. I'm with Tauren. Interesting…

He's still sleeping, and when I look over him, I notice that my brother is, too. Tauren's bronze hair is all ruffled about, and for some reason it brings a grin to my lips like a reflex. It just *happens*. I actually have to bite my lip to get it to stop.

Shifting in the bed, things start coming back to me. The sex last night was so intense I'm literally bliss-hungover. It feels like I chased a bottle of happiness with a rainbow joint rolled by a unicorn. This feeling is so foreign, I almost think I'm dreaming for a second.

I haven't been happy a day since Tauren left, and I haven't been feeling well at all since Dr. Roberts upped my medications. And what with Mom keeping Cyrus away from me at all costs, I've been sleeping my days away.

I'm still not even sure how Cyrus was able to sneak into my bedroom last night as soon as the clock struck midnight and it was officially our eighteenth birthday. But he did, and he was sort of frantic as he shook me awake, whispering, "Come on. We're going to see Tauren."

Thank God for my good-bad twin brother and his plan. Because last night was... hypnotic.

It was one of those experiences that reaches deep down into your soul and pulls out everything you need, then hands it to you on a silver platter like, *here you go. Be happy now.*

Cyrus and Tauren… *Both* of them… They give me so much, in such different ways. I don't want to lose it. I can't.

I can't go back to life before last night.

Tauren's large, muscular body shifts, and he pulls me closer to him by the arm that's around my waist. That psycho smile is back on my face as I nestle up to him. I don't even notice how rock-hard my dick is until it brushes against Tauren's thigh. An uncontrollable purr leaves my lips, and I scowl at myself.

Oh my God, I'm being such a swoony chick right now.

I bite my lip, though, because I kind of like it.

Okay, I really *do.*

My eyes slide over all the visible surfaces of Tauren, my fingers following their lead. I find the star tattoos on his pelvis and trace them slowly, which pulls a sound out of him that's more of a vibration than anything. I peek up at him, only to startle when I find him gazing down at me.

Our eyes lock and we just stare for a few moments. He looks so much more relaxed than he was last night. The first thing I thought when I saw him was how even with circles under his eyes and his stubble overgrown, he's just plain gorgeous. It's almost unfair. I think he actually looks better when he's stressed and exhausted.

But then again, I've always liked damage.

Tauren's fingers draw small circles on the naked flesh of my lower back, and I let out a small breath. It's baffling how *right* this feels…

I've never felt anything like this with any of the girls I've messed around with. The only time I've experienced it is with Cyrus, which I guess should've been a huge flashing neon sign that says, *You're gay, dummy.*

But then I also sort of thought it was just Cyrus doing that to me. Something I wanted so badly even though I knew it was wrong. Being gay and loving Cyrus had twisted together into the same issue over the years, until I ended up thinking both were bad.

You can't love him like that. You can't love a him *like that.*

Where have those voices been coming from? Because they don't even sound like my own.

"You get this little crease between your brows when your mind is running wild, you know," Tauren whispers. He smiles, lighting up the entire world around me. "It's sexy."

"I don't think all my issues are sexy, old man," I grumble, partially teasing, though I know deep down I'm really not.

"I do," he replies firmly. He's dead serious. Smile melted into a line and everything.

I swallow. "Why?"

"I told you before," he mumbles, grabbing my ass abruptly hard in his palm and pulling me up effortlessly so that our faces are in line. A startled gasp flees my lips as I gape at him. "You're perfect the way you are."

The block of ice around my heart is melting under the sunshine of this man. This *man*; a big, strong one, who wields control over me like a king I

love bowing to. It's so unexpected, but he's flipped a switch inside me. I feel like the best possible version of myself when he's around.

And now I realize that maybe it started with me pretending to be Cyrus, but it was less about that and more about me channeling *my* inner Cyrus. All of those amazing qualities my brother has that I've always envied… I have them inside me, too.

Tauren isn't perfect either. I found that bad side I always knew he was hiding. But it turns out his darkness really compliments the fuck out of his light.

Unable to stop myself, I lurch forward and press my lips to his. And he growls, squeezing my ass harder while he sucks on my bottom lip until I'm fucking dazed.

"Sweet, perfect lips," he rumbles on my mouth.

I can't help the way I'm clinging to him right now. It just feels *so damn good*, to climb his big body like a tree with all six of our legs tangled. I'm so lost in his dizzying kisses I barely even notice that I'm grinding my hips on him.

He pulls away from me, leaving me wanting so much more, taking my chin between his fingers. His blue eyes lock on mine and he says, "If you call me old man again, you'll have my cock so deep in your throat you won't be able to apologize."

A chill of nervous elation fizzles inside me while I squirm in his arms. I feel my brother shifting awake, and I watch his eyes fluttering open as he looks around and reacquaints himself with reality like I did just a few minutes ago.

"Did I die last night?" Cyrus stretches out, a gentle smirk on his lips.

Tauren chuckles and shifts, then takes Cy's chin, tugging my brother's mouth to his for a soft kiss that I feel in my chest. When they pull apart, Tauren croons, "Good morning, beautiful."

"Hi… I mean, good morning," Cyrus stutters with hearts in his eyes.

It should make me jealous, but now I can't help smiling. It's really delusional, and I want to hide it, but I can't. It's just *living* on my lips right now.

Things feel different when the three of us are together… Me and Cyrus, with Tauren in the middle. *Maybe my weed is laced, because this shit is fucking crazy.*

Tauren looks between Cyrus and me, giving us a sort of expectant look. I think it means he wants us to…

Leaning over his chest, I grasp my brother's jaw and kiss him greedily. Cyrus is instantly trying to crawl into me, because we haven't been able to do this in a while and he misses it so much.

I think I do, too.

"Happy birthday, G," I mumble on his pouty lips, and he grins.

"Happy birthday, B."

"Hmm, that's a good idea," Tauren hums, and we peek up at him. "Birthday breakfast?" We both nod and he chuckles. "Or should we birthday shower first?"

Oh yes. My dick likes that idea.

"Yes, please," Cy and I murmur at the same time, and Tauren's grin turns up in brightness.

This is beyond weird, this whole thing… but I'm kind of obsessed with it.

The three of us scramble out of bed, Cy and me racing into the bathroom to get the shower started. Once we're in and warm water is rushing over our sore muscles, Tauren gets on his knees almost immediately under the guise of *birthday blowjobs*.

I swear to God, I almost collapse, watching him suck me and Cyrus at the same time. Him, *Tauren Vance*. On his knees, dripping wet with two cocks in his mouth.

Five minutes in and I'm holding myself up on my brother. And because he's Tauren, he brings us right up to climax, then stops, like his name is Professor Edge.

He pats his lap, and tells my brother, "Ride me while you suck the cum out of his big, beautiful dick, baby."

Propping myself against the wall instead, I hold my brother's jaw while he throats me good, bouncing on Tauren's lap where he kneels on the shower floor.

Pure insanity. And I don't want to be well.

"That's right, you little slut," Tauren whispers in Cy's ear, holding his hips and helping him ride. "Take every inch down your tight throat. Swallow all that dick."

"Jesus… both of your mouths are killing me," I gasp as my head spins.

The *Dirty-Talk Award* goes to Tauren Vance, for sure. I could probably come just from listening to him.

It takes us all only a few more minutes of wet slapping, grunting, and slurping before we're coming all over ourselves and each other. Cyrus and I crumble into a pile on the floor, and Tauren actually lifts us both up. He gets back on his knees and tells us to hold on to his shoulders while he washes us. Which is exactly what he does.

He washes every single inch of us with intricate care while we doze and daydream, enjoying the pampering and wishing it could always be like this.

After that, Tauren gives us both bathrobes to wear, then orders room service. We have to stay hidden in the bedroom when they come to drop it off, which sucks. A lot about this sucks. I don't want to think about the reality of our situation at all. I just want to stay happy in this dreamland forever.

But unfortunately, that's not a possibility.

While we're eating our waffles and bacon, Cyrus's phone starts blowing up. We don't even need to look at the screen to know it's Mom.

After five calls in a row, Cyrus groans. "I should probably answer it, so she doesn't send someone over here."

I nod, hating that he's right. Looking to Tauren for his opinion, I find him staring off into space. I don't like it. He's always been so assured and confident. I despise seeing him like this.

"You turned your location off, right?" I ask Cyrus and he nods.

Then he sighs and stands up, answering the ringing phone. "Hi, Mom."

I can hear her from where I'm sitting, and I roll my eyes. He wanders off while trying to pacify her, assuring her he's *fine*.

Finishing my bacon, I try my best to ignore the nonsense coming back into my mind. I really didn't miss it.

"What happened at graduation?" Tauren's voice pulls me out of my head, and I pause my chewing. His wide eyes, shining with remorse find mine, and I swallow nervously. "Please, Col. Tell me… tell me it wasn't that bad."

I don't know what to say. Because I don't want to lie to him, but it *was* that bad… It was awful.

Cy's biggest fear, people mocking him while public speaking. I mean, come on. I can't even imagine how that must have felt. He's been dealing with it surprisingly well, but then again, I've barely spoken to him since it

happened, what with our psycho mother running the house like a prison guard.

Finally, I find my voice. “Cyrus’s valedictorian speech got all fucked up because everyone was talking shit. I beat Jared Milligan’s ass for calling him a *faggot*, and then I told everyone it was me in the video, not Cyrus.” Tauren gawks at me with wide blue eyes, like he has no idea how to process all of this information. My forehead lines. “You haven’t been following the media shitstorm, have you?”

He shakes his head slowly. “No. I knew it would just drive me crazy.”

We’re both quiet for a moment in thought. He’s right… I wish I didn’t know what was going on. Not that I’ve been looking at my phone at all, even after deleting all my social media accounts. But it’s hard to ignore things when people are shouting it at you every time you step outside your house.

I want to ask Tauren what’s going on with work, but I don’t want to add any more stress. According to what I saw in the limited reports I’ve let myself look at, Tauren’s name is being dragged through the mud because of what my dumbass mother did, telling all her friends about what happened, and the video.

For people with as much fillers as they’ve had, their lips are especially loose.

That’s why I did what I did at graduation. I got there ready to go watch Cyrus’s speech and they wouldn’t let me in. To *my own* fucking graduation. It was then that some asshole made a slick remark about Cyrus and Tauren.

It was all over after that. I knew it was only a matter of time before I bashed someone’s face in. *And would you look at that? I was right.*

Cyrus steps back into the room, yanking his hair in his fist. He plops down on the couch next to Tauren, then nods at me. “Mom says happy birthday.”

I laugh out loud. “No, she doesn’t.”

“No, you’re right.” He sighs. “She… did not.”

“Does she think you’re here?” Tauren asks, his tone rife with worry, though he drapes his arm around Cy’s shoulder, fingers trailing the slope of his neck. Cyrus shakes his head.

“No. She knows I’m with Col, though,” he mutters. “She’s demanding that I come home, but I told her we’re eighteen now. She’s not the dictator anymore.”

Tauren pulls Cyrus in closer, Cy's head resting on his chest while Tauren's lips brush through his dark hair.

I want to go sit with them. I want to be on the receiving end of more affectionate cuddles. But then I'm also too *angry* right now. Too frustrated. My stomach is churning and aching, my head is all clouded up once more… It sucks.

I was finally feeling happiness for the first time in so long, and my mother ruined it again. As usual.

Now I need to move before I just collapse and cry on the floor.

I need to do something.

Jumping up from my seat, I start pacing.

"Baby, sit down and eat," Tauren rumbles, but I just shake my head.

"Are you going to step down from Knight-Life?" I ask him, my tone accusatory enough for him to raise a scolding brow at my audacity. "Tauren, I'm being serious. You can fuck the sass out of me if you want to, but I need an answer to this. I feel like…"

"Don't say it," he barks at me, his eyes shining discipline while also reflecting some serious emotions. I can't tell for sure, but I think he might *love* the fact that I'm worried about him. He stands up slowly, prowling over to me, looking scary-sexy enough that I stop pacing and stare at him with wide eyes. "Do *not* tell me again that this is your fault. It's not."

I swallow and nod.

"If I choose to leave Knight-Life behind, that will be my decision and no one else's. And I don't want you worrying about that." He glances at Cyrus. "Either of you. Is that clear?"

This time, we both nod.

He steps into me, placing his large hands on my shoulders. "I don't want you worrying about anything. I'm going to take care of this. I'll figure it out, okay?"

I don't feel right about what he's saying. I don't think he should have to carry all this weight on his shoulders. Regardless of what he says, we're all responsible, not just him.

But I don't say any of that. Instead, I just nod and let him kiss the burden off my mouth.



CYRUS and I stayed with Tauren for the rest of the day. We left in the middle of the night, like bandits, making off with a bag of secrets and bite marks beneath our clothes.

Except that fleeing didn't feel anywhere near as good as the lingering bruises our stepdad had given the both of us.

We wanted to stay with him. Of course we did. But he made us agree to go back home. He said us staying with him would only make things worse. Unfortunately, I know he's right. And it really fucking sucks.

This whole thing is such crap. I hate how much dumb people who aren't involved at all think they know everything. As soon as the rumors broke, it all blew up. Between the constant messages and phone calls, and paparazzi assholes lingering on our property line. It reminded me all too much of when Dad was arrested.

I just can't believe this shit is happening again.

But Tauren is right. I need to stop blaming myself.

Instead, I'm blaming Carla Whittle Becker Vance.

Which is what leads me to my new plan.

The next day, Paris picks me up in her mom's G-Wagon. We've actually been talking a ton lately. And after she helped my brother at graduation without a second thought, I think I can safely say she's a real friend. Turns out she likes me as a person as much as she loves my awesome make-out skills.

Plus, she was technically the first person I came out to, which bonded us a little. She's fascinated at how *not-gay* I seem. I told her that's offensive, but then we both just laughed our asses off. Because she's right.

I see my sexuality as something that relies on the person more than their gender. But I can't deny that I've never felt about anyone the way I feel about Tauren. And my brother… Though that part will have to stay in secret.

Paris drives us to downtown Solana, where my mom is getting her nails done. Our plan is to follow her. *We're on an honest-to-God stakeout.*

Hopefully, one of us gets to say, "This ain't what I signed up for." That would awesome.

We sit outside in the car, parked across from the salon with a clear view of Mom's car for over an hour. Then we follow her to the bank. Then to The Chateau, probably for lunch with one of her bitchy friends.

"How long are we going to be doing this for?" Paris whines with her bare feet propped up on the dash.

"As long as it takes," I mutter, picking at my nail polish. I did purple this time.

Because I'm gay now and I do what I want.

"What if she never does anything incriminating?" she asks while texting her little thumbs off.

"She will."

But she doesn't. Not that day, anyway.

Or the next day.

Or the next.

All week we follow her everywhere. And yes, she does a lot, but none of it is what I'm looking for. I would specifically like to catch her fucking someone, or doing drugs or something. If I can stumble upon something incriminating like that, then it'll hurt her case against Tauren.

I need to find something that will clear his name. I don't want him to lose everything because he fucked me. I can't have that kind of curse hanging over my head.

It's a Friday afternoon, and I'm puttering around the house, stalking my mother's every move. And she's so oblivious to my presence she doesn't even notice. The only time she looks at me is when I'm too close to Cyrus, at which point she does everything in her power to separate us.

The thing is that she can't *really* keep us away from each other. Even that big asshole she hired is just for intimidation.

Still, the atmosphere around here is like death row. No one's happy. The air is quiet and tense. No smiles or laughs or teasing like when Tauren was here. I think the change has been so drastic it's fucking with me, like internally. I've really been feeling like shit lately, and I'm too exhausted to even be mad about it.

Cy and I are just waiting to go off to UCLA so we can get the fuck out of this house. Even *I'm* going to try out college. I don't really want to, but if it means I can be with Cyrus and be away from Carla, then I'll take it.

Speaking of, her phone rings and she answers it, while I creep around the corner, eavesdropping.

At first, I'm not sure who she's talking to. But then she says something that gives it away.

"What do you mean he's missed three sessions? We had an agreement. He was supposed to be seeing you twice a week while he's living in this house."

Dr. Roberts?

She pauses for a moment while I hold my breath.

"Why the hell am I just hearing about this?? Ugh, fine. I'll be right there."

The clacking of her heels means she's stalking away. As soon as she gets outside, I dart behind her. I wait for her car to pull out of the driveway and then I rush to the Audi. But before I can get to it, that big oaf stops me with a hand on my arm.

He doesn't say a word. Honestly, I don't even think he has a voice. But there is a sinister look in his eyes while he grips my arm, tugging his phone out of his pocket.

He's going to call her. Fuck fuck.

"Get your hands off me!" I shout. He looks startled for a moment, but he's still touching me. So I shout some more. "What, you heard about that video and now you think you can force me to suck your dick?!"

The guy's face drops as fast as he drops my arm. He looks around, probably concerned that a neighbor is going to hear. Or more likely, the cluttered group of photographers at the bottom of our driveway.

"No means no, asshole!" I bark, and he backs up.

Glaring up at him, I whisper, "Mind your business, or I'll tell everyone you forced me to touch your dick, and it was hard." He blinks at me in mild horror. "Yea."

Whipping open the door to the Audi, I slink inside and start it up, slamming the door behind me, all the while glowering at him. He looks shook enough that he probably won't call my mother. Still, I need to hurry up, just in case.

Peeling out of the driveway, I speed toward my shrink's office, my mind whirling as I go. I've no-showed on my last three appointments with Dr. Roberts. Mainly because I have no desire to keep following my mother's stupid rules now that I'm eighteen. Also, I fucking hate him. I always have.

He’s done nothing but tell me how fucked up I am for years. The thing is, I know I’m fucked up. But I thought it was the psychiatrist’s job to help you get better, or at least work toward it. But nothing about seeing Dr. Roberts makes me feel good. His meds turn me into a zombie, and I come out of my visits feeling like I hate myself.

I used to think it was because I *do* hate myself. But after feeling what Tauren made me feel, I’m not sure that’s true. Maybe I just need to surround myself with people who love and appreciate me for who I am, rather than people who want me to be something I’m not.

When I get to Dr. Robert’s office, Mom’s car is already there. I park across the street and scurry over because I can’t just watch this time. I need to hear what they’re talking about in there. Inside his office, I’m surprised to find that his receptionist is nowhere to be found. It’s weird, but good, because now I can spy without having to somehow distract Jenny.

Sneaking over to the door, I open it a crack, slinking my phone out of my pocket and pressing record while I listen.

“Well, then you’re just going to have to raise the dose again,” Mom says. “Or give him something else. Something that will really bulldoze his nervous system.”

“Carla, I’ve already been prescribing him things that, when combined, run the risk of seriously fraying the wires.”

“I don’t want to *run the risk*,” she growls. “I want to do it. Remember what Dustin told you two years ago? You should remember, you agreed to it.”

Dr. Roberts pauses for a moment. “He told me to *dope the queer out of him*. But Carla, I’m not sure I feel comfortable adding even more medication to the list. Some of these things are pretty damaging. He could experience seizures, or slip into a coma—”

“Good!” My mother scoffs. “If he’s in a coma, he can’t ruin our lives anymore.”

“Jesus, Carla…”

“Look, Tim, you’ve had no problem cashing the exorbitant checks we’ve been writing you over the years to fix my son’s afflictions, have you?” Roberts doesn’t answer. “But you haven’t held up your end of the bargain. Now I’m stuck making this shit happen on my own…”

“What does that mean?”

“It means I have a few prospects for that video. They’re in a bidding war right now, it’s hilarious. There’s this gay porn website willing to wire me half a million right now in exchange for that thing, which would be the only good to come out of your inability to properly drug my kid.”

“Carla, if something happens to him, I can’t have it on my conscience…”

She laughs. “Oh, look who has a conscience now?? Don’t start, Tim. You’ve been doing this for years. And I seem to recall you also taking *other* forms of payment…”

There are some rustling sounds and a grunt. I force my shaky hand to push the door open enough to aim my camera at them. It gets a perfect shot of my mother kneeling before my doctor.

“If you get Colson out of the picture, I’ll share the money from my video sales with you…” She pulls his dick out and starts sucking it.

And now I’m about to puke for multiple reasons.

I make sure to record for a few more seconds, just to make sure I’ve definitely got it before I stumble out of the office. As soon as I’m outside in the parking lot, I immediately turn and vomit in the bushes.

My stomach is crashing violently, and my brain feels like it’s been boiled in cyanide and misery.

What the fuck did I just hear…?

My parents have been paying this man to give me the wrong drugs for years??

To what… try to un-gay me? Because they thought I was going to turn Cyrus??

It’s such a ridiculous thought I actually laugh out loud for a second, although it’s devoid of amusement. My heart feels like it’s been cut out of my body and is lying on the blacktop while people smash it with baseball bats.

I’m shaking so hard I’m having trouble walking right, but eventually I make it back to my car. As soon as I’m inside, I break the fuck down.

Tears slide down my cheeks, but I can’t feel them. I can barely feel *anything*.

I’m a sad wooden doll.

Pulling the mirror down, I look at my face. The circles under my eyes are dark and pronounced, mixed with the smudged eyeliner from days ago. I look like a heroin junkie. I’m pale and my pupils are huge.

Those meds… they're doing this to me. They're hurting me, not helping me. They were never meant to help me.

He said I could have a seizure or slip into a coma…

"What the fuck?" I growl, then punch the steering wheel.

It's all making so much sense…

I've vomited blood before, but I always told myself it was the drinking. It's hard for me to fall asleep, but then sometimes when I do, I sleep for a full day. Certain foods taste like metal.

Crouching forward, I drop my head into my hands.

I tried to stop taking the meds last week, and I spent the whole day with chills and cold sweats, heaving my guts out. So I gave up and took them, which stopped it… The sickness.

And at the time I didn't want to think about it, but I know that means my body was withdrawing.

Sniffling and wiping my eyes, I start the car up and peel away, racing back home. The entire drive to the house I'm in a fog. When I pull into the driveway, I can't even remember how I got here.

Shaking my head, I storm inside and rush upstairs. This is fucking ludicrous. I can't even believe this is happening to me…

In my bathroom medicine cabinet, I shuffle through my pill bottles. I take three different medications, sometimes four, if I really can't sleep. And they're all prescribed by Dr. Roberts.

Reading the names of the meds to myself, I can't even pronounce them.

"Ugh!" I roar and wipe all the bottles off the counter, sending them flying all over the place. Stomping over to my desk, I open my laptop and type in a quick search.

Dr. Roberts said I had Narcissistic Personality Disorder…

I'm able to find pretty quickly that doctors try to treat narcissism with a slew of things like antidepressants, mood stabilizers, or antipsychotics. But the symptoms don't sound like me at all. It even says that you can't technically diagnose a patient with this disorder until after they're eighteen. This motherfucker had me pegged two fucking years ago.

And when I type in the names of my drugs, this shit's all over the place. An antipsychotic used to treat Schizophrenia, an opiate-derived pain killer, and some other thing that has more negative shit written about it online than positive, and a list of side-effects longer than the Cheesecake Factory menu.

The more I read about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, the more I'm *sure* Dr. Dipshit's diagnosis was crap. The symptoms don't sound anything like me. If anything, it sounds like how I've turned out since I've been seeing his fraudulent ass.

What the fuck is this bullshit??

My legs collapse out from under me, and I slide down on to the floor. My gaze goes far away, and I just stare.

For hours.

The next thing I know, it's dark all around me and my ass is numb from sitting on the floor for so long. Sucking in a fast breath, I blink for what feels like the first time in hours. *Did I fall asleep… black out?? What the hell just happened?*

Toppling over onto my side, I lift my hands to my face. I think I've been crying again, but I can't feel it.

My own mother hates me so much she wants me in a coma… She wants me dead.

My father, too.

"What did I do to deserve this…?" I whisper.

My lashes flutter as my thoughts wind. I love Cyrus.

That's what I did. And they've been punishing me for it all along.

They want to put me down because I'm sick. And maybe they're right. Maybe I was the one who corrupted Cyrus. After all, I kissed him first.

Did I give him the disease?

I always thought I was helping him, giving him what he needed when he couldn't get it from someone else. But maybe that was just an excuse…

An excuse for me to drag him into Hell with me. So I don't have to be alone.

My stomach cramps violently, and I curl into the fetal position, writhing in pain. This happens all the time. More in the last few weeks. Maybe the last few months, but before, when Tauren was here, everything just felt generally better.

Now that he's gone, the pain is much more noticeable.

"Tauren…" I whisper his name through rampant sniffles while my gut cramps up something fierce. "Cyrus…"

I'm not sure where Cyrus is… But he's probably in his room. I could call out for him, have him save me like he did the night I had a meltdown on the side of the road.

Or I could solve this problem myself, and stop ruining their lives.

That's what Mom said, right? If I were in a coma, I would stop ruining their lives…

Crawling on my hands and knees to my bathroom, I remember the times Tauren told me to crawl to him. The memories dull the pain just enough.

"I'm sorry…" I whisper as I reach for the pill bottles scattered all over the floor.

My thoughts are dense, packing too tight on the inside of my skull as I open each bottle and empty its contents into a pile on the floor.

These pills were supposed to put me in a coma, right?

I scoop up a handful. *So I stop ruining their lives??*

I dump a bunch into my mouth and force myself to swallow. They fizzle up, leaving a horrid taste behind. I gag and gag, but eventually I get some down. Picking up one at a time, I pop them into my mouth, swallowing becoming easier now that saliva is flowing in my mouth like a faucet.

There are so many of them… I can't take them all. But that's okay.

Hopefully, this is enough for that coma.

Maybe I'll finally get some decent sleep.

Lying down on the floor on my side, my eyelids begin to droop. I can't tell if the pills are working already or if I'm just *so tired*.

But either way, a calm washes over me.

I can feel the breeze on my face, like that day at the top of the Ferris wheel.

"I'm doing this for you…" I whisper in the dark. I try to stick out my middle finger, but I can't feel anything.

Nothing but ocean air, my brother's fingers in mine… And his smile.

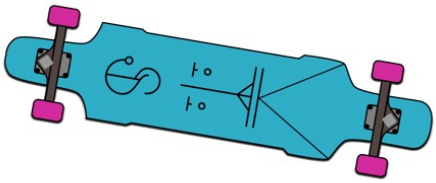
Fuck 'em.

Go out with a bang.

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CYRUS



S*omething doesn’t feel right…*

Goosebumps sheet my skin while I skate up the road, and it’s sort of strange, because it’s warm out.

My stomach is twisting up into knots and I’m not sure why.

I decided to go for a cruise on my longboard, to get some perspective and some fresh air. Living inside that house has been suffocating lately. Since Tauren left, yes, but even more since Colson and I spent our birthday with him.

All I wanted in the world was to stay with him. I think I would run away from everything I’ve wanted for my entire life if it meant always being with him and Colson the way we were that night.

I would give up UCLA in a heartbeat. The comfort of the life we’ve lived since birth…

It’s really not all that *comfortable*, anyway. It never has been.

Colson’s been hanging on by a thread lately, and it’s worrying me so much I can barely eat, barely sleep. I stay up at night staring at the wall that separates our bedrooms, praying to a God I don’t think wants to hear from me that he can find comfort. That he can *hold on*, just a little bit longer.

In a couple of months, we’ll be leaving for college together, and sure, that won’t be what either of us really wants, but it’s better than this. *Anything is better than this…*

I’ve been cruising the streets of our neighborhood for a couple of hours, but it’s time to go home. I need to check on my brother. There’s this voice

in my brain… Or maybe it’s more of an internal alarm. And it’s telling me he needs me.

I don’t give a fuck what Mom says. We’re adults. She can’t control us anymore.

Kicking and pushing down the hill, back toward our house, I weave my way around the turns, past a couple of lingering photographers at our property line and up the driveway. Mom’s car is gone, but the Audi is here, which means Colson is home. *Thank God.*

Letting out a breath of relief, I hop off my board, carrying it inside. I prop it against the wall in the foyer and look around the dark, silent house, like a museum of tragedy, closed for the night.

“Colson?” I call out, taking the stairs two at a time.

It’s *too* quiet in here.

The air is rippling sonic waves of mayhem, the awful, sickening feeling in my gut growing stronger with every step I stalk up the hallway to our bedrooms. When I push through the cracked door of his, I find a dark, empty bedroom.

“Col?” My unsteady voice calls out as I step into the room.

I don’t see him anywhere, and I’m about to turn around when I catch something in my peripheral.

A shoe… on a foot. On the ground.

My face flings toward my brother’s bathroom where I see him lying on the floor; a broken doll in worn Chucks and black jeans.

Fear clutches my insides as I rush to him, crashing to my knees by his side.

He’s pale, and there’s foam coming from his mouth.

No…

No no no!

“Fuck! Colson!” I scream, grabbing him and shaking him.

He’s completely out of it. There’s vomit next to him, along with a bunch of pills and a few empty bottles. *This isn’t happening.*

Everything I’ve ever known flashes behind my eyes while I clutch him for dear life… His dear *dear* life. “Fuck fuck fuck, *no*.”

My internal fight-or-flight kicks on immediately and I’m ready to *fight*. As twitchy I am, adrenaline and terror coursing through my veins, I don’t even think. I’m acting on instinct. My hands are so shaky, I can barely get

my phone out of my pocket, but I manage it. Dropping it onto the floor, I dial 911 on speaker while I try to check my brother's pulse.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I growl at myself, "Focus. Calm down and *focus*."

Forcing myself to buck up, I press my trembling fingers up to his throat. The pulse is there, but it's faint.

Everything is happening in a blur. The person on the phone is asking me things and I don't even feel like I'm speaking. I know I am, but it all feels so far away. Like I'm watching myself from somewhere else.

I give my brother's limp body CPR, but I'm crying and shaking too hard to know if I'm doing it right. My hands cup his face and I beg, I fucking *plead* with him to wake up.

My forehead drops onto his while I weep, and the person on the phone tells me to stay with them and stay strong. To *calm down.*

But I can't *calm down*.

My brother is fucking dying and I can't save him.

I wasn't here.

I knew he was suffering, and I left him alone.

What kind of twin are you??

"Colson, please," I sniffle. "Come back to me. Please, baby. *Please*. I'll make it better, I promise." My tears fall onto his face. "I love you. I fucking love you and nothing else matters, do you hear me?? *Nothing*."

It feels like way too long before I hear banging on the door downstairs.

"Up here!" My hoarse voice shouts, because I'm not leaving him. I'd rather drop dead right here and now than leave him for *one second*. "Tell them to come upstairs," I whimper to the person on the phone.

I hear footsteps, but they're too far away.

"Hurry up," I sob into my brother's chest.

Paramedics stomp into the room, and I reluctantly move out of the way. I'm blinded by my tears as blurry people check my brother's vitals, then lift him onto a gurney. I follow after them, shivering while I jog to keep up.

"I'm not leaving him." My voice barely comes out. We make it outside into the driveway where they immediately load him into an ambulance, saying all kinds of words so fast it sounds like gibberish. "I'm not leaving him," I croak again.

"You can ride with him," someone says.

I climb into the ambulance next to my unconscious brother while they hook things up to him.

“Do you know if he took anything other than the pills we found?” They ask me twice before I can even understand them enough to answer.

“Um… I don’t…” My head shakes while I tremor so hard my teeth are chattering. *Buck up, Cyrus. Your brother needs you.* “He smokes and drinks sometimes…”

They go back to talking to each other, giving him an IV as the ambulance rips out of the driveway, siren blaring. I scoot closer to Colson, taking his hand in mine.

“Col, I’m here,” I tell him over all the noise. His body wiggles on the stretcher as they soar over bumps in the road, and I swallow down the dread filling me like sand. “I’m not leaving your side for one second. I’m right fucking here. And you’re gonna—” My voice cuts out into a sob I gulp down. “You’re gonna wake up.”

The paramedic tries saying something to me, but I can’t hear him. My eyes won’t leave my brother for the entire fifteen-minute drive to the hospital.

Things feel slow and painful while we drive. It takes *way too long*.

But once we arrive at the hospital, time speeds back up again.

They rush him inside and I chase after them. But when they push through a third set of doors, a woman stops me.

“Let me go!” I scream at her.

“Sweetie, sweetie. Calm down.” She holds my shoulders as I struggle against her.

“No! Back off! I’m not leaving him! I fucking told you that!”

“Honey, breathe for me.” She speaks in a tone that’s patronizingly calm.

“Fuck breathing,” I gasp, bending at the waist while my head spins.

“Someone grab some water, please!” she shouts. “Here, honey. Take a seat before you fall down.”

“I’ll take a seat… when I know my… brother is… okay,” I heave, reaching for my inhaler.

Now they’re fussing over me. *I’m not the one who’s unconscious!*

I brush everyone off and pace around the hallway. And they let me, because clearly, I’m not going to *sit down*, or go into the goddamn waiting area. *Fuck that.*

I’m going to find a way through that door. Into the… ICU.

The ICU… My brother's in the ICU. He might *die*.

Before I know what's happening, I crash onto my ass on the floor and weep hysterically into my hands.

Minutes later, after I'm sure many people have witnessed my meltdown, I finally accept the water from the nurse.

"Can you tell me where he is? Or what's happening?" I plead from the floor in a pathetic, scratchy voice.

The nurse kneels down next to me. "All I know is that he's being cared for right now. And I've told the doctor to give you an update the moment he has one, okay?"

I nod slowly. My gaze goes to the wall opposite me. And it stays there for what feels like hours.

"You have a phone, sweetie?" the nurse calls from her desk, snapping me out of it. "You want to call someone? Maybe your parents?"

I blink. *I should probably call Mom.…*

Patting my pocket, I realize I left my phone on the bathroom floor. Standing up on wobbly legs, I shuffle to the desk and take the phone. But I don't call my mother.

I call someone else.

"Hello?" Tauren's gruff voice flows through the phone into my ear, instantly soothing the hurt; patching up my inner wounds with one fucking word.

And I burst into more dried-up tears.

"Hello?? Who's…" His voice cuts out, before he mumbles, "What happened?"

"T-tauren," I whimper, scolding myself internally to get it together, for the eighth damn time. "It's Cyrus. I'm at the um… hospital. St. M-mary's. Colson's here. He had an… overdose, I think."

Tauren is quiet for a second before I hear a harsh breath. "I'm coming now. Don't move, okay, baby? Breathe and I'll be right there."

"Okay," I sob softly. We hang up and I tell the nurse, "My stepdad is coming. C-can you let him in when he gets here? His name is… Tauren Vance."

The nurse gives me a peculiar look, but nods anyway.

Nothing at all happens for a half-hour. I stand in the exact same spot and stare, feeling every single one of the seconds while they each tick by,

painfully slow, as if all eighteen-hundred of them come with an individual knife to the heart.

Some form of commotion eventually snaps me out of it, and I look up. Someone is shouting in the waiting area. But before I can go check it out, the doors burst open and Tauren stalks through them, making a beeline directly for me.

He looks *severely* distraught. More than I've ever seen him before. It takes everything I have not to break down again.

"Oh my God, Cy." He stomps to me, grabbing me in his arms.

He hugs me too tight, clutching onto me, giving me strength in his almost crushing embrace; warmth and love in his harsh grip, like he's holding me together. It's *everything* I need right now.

I cry into his chest while he rocks me.

"What's happening? Do we have any idea what's going on?" he shouts at someone, but I hear no response, because all I can hear is his voice and our hearts pounding in synch while he holds my broken pieces together.

Finally, he peels off me, and I can tell he wants to do or say so much more, but everyone is staring at us. I *feel* their eyes, just like at graduation. When I look up, I see the nurses whispering.

My jaw clenches in rage. "Where's the fucking doctor?? How long does it take to get an update?!"

They pale, and one of the nurses rushes off, returning two minutes later with a doctor.

"Do we have the family of Colson Becker here?" he asks us, and we both nod.

"I'm his stepfather, this is his brother," Tauren says.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Vassar. I recognize you," the doctor says to me, and I glare at him. "I mean, you're identical, yes?"

"Oh, right…" I whisper, shaking it off. "What's going on?? Is he going to be okay?"

"It's too soon to tell, unfortunately," the doctor replies. "We've pumped his stomach, but he seems to be experiencing some complications unrelated to the overdose…"

Tauren and I share a look. "What does that mean?" Tauren asks.

"Again, it's too soon to say for sure, but he's showing symptoms of acute kidney failure. We'll know more with the results of his blood work

and the toxicology. We're also reaching out to his psychiatrist. A—" He pauses to look down at his chart. "Dr. Roberts."

I feel Tauren stiffen at my side, though he says nothing. Simply nods and replies, "Alright, well… Please let us know what's going on as soon as possible. If he needs anything… and I mean fucking *anything*, get it for him. I don't care what you have to do. Got it?"

Dr. Vassar nods nervously and turns away, leaving us to stand around like helpless idiots.

Tauren releases a ragged breath, draping a large hand on my shoulder. "We should… go sit down, I guess."

My head shakes *no*, but I can't speak. I just keep watching the doors the doctor disappeared through. The doors separating me from my brother who might be dying.

I'll die right alongside him.

"He said… *Kidney failure*?" I peer at Tauren.

He blinks, eyes etched in worry. "Something isn't right about this." He pulls his phone out of his pocket. "Hang on, baby," he whispers to me, wandering across the hall while he makes a phone call.

What is going on…?

Closing my eyes, I yank at my hair. *Wake up wake up…*

This has to be a nightmare. *There's no way this is really happening.*

Suddenly, a familiar shrill voice snaps my head up. *Fuck…*

My mother bursts through the doors like a bat out of hell, her eyes immediately going to Tauren. "Oh, you've gotta be kidding me! Security!"

I dart over to her, "Mom, calm down. I called him—"

"Security!" She ignores me and keeps shouting. "Get this man out of here, now!"

Tauren hangs up his call and pushes his way up to my mother, eyes blazing blue fury. "You must be dumber than I thought if you think I'm leaving this hospital until I know he's alright."

"I'm not talking to you," she scoffs. "Cyrus, how could you call this sicko?? After everything he did to your brother?!"

"He didn't do shit, Mom, enough!" I hiss at her.

She looks taken aback, but only for a moment before she hollers again, "Security! I want this man out of here! He's a danger to my son!"

"Shut up!" I roar while Tauren pulls me away from her.

“Carla, you are so far out of line right now,” he seethes, his voice scary low.

“*I’m* out of line?!” she squawks. “He’s probably in here because of you!”

“Or *you*,” he growls. “Where’s your pal, Dr. Roberts, hm?”

Mom’s face goes ashen. She tries to cover up the nervous glint in her eyes by rolling them, but Tauren isn’t buying it.

And now neither am I.

Dr. Roberts…?

The pill bottles.

Why is Colson taking so many pills?

And why am I only just noticing all of this??

Guilt is swimming in my veins, thick, like tar. Colson has been acting strangely for months… years even. The medication was supposed to be helping him, but lately all I’ve seen are bad symptoms.

Two large security guards rush over to us while Mom and Tauren bark at each other.

“Yes! Finally, thank you. Right here!” Mom points at Tauren.

They move up to him, but pause when he seethes at them, “Put your hands on me, I *dare* you.”

“You might recognize him from the news,” Mom says smugly. “He’s the billionaire who slept with his wife’s teenage son. The one who’s in the hospital right now…”

Someone nearby gasps. *Great. This is fucking perfect.*

The guards reach for Tauren, grabbing him by the arms as he yanks himself out of their grip like a wild animal fighting to break free from chains.

People are yelling, and *everyone* is staring. And I can’t fucking breathe enough to speak.

Leave him alone! He didn’t do anything!

It wasn’t his fault…

The guards are fighting with Tauren, and he’s swinging at them.

People are *screaming*.

I cover my eyes with my hands. *Wake up!!*

But I can’t.

I’m trapped in the purgatory of this nightmare that is my life.



I'VE BEEN STARING for so long my eyes are burning.

Sitting in this uncomfortable waiting room chair, my leg bouncing rapidly, I can't help but glance at the clock every ten seconds.

It's been eight hours since I last saw the doctor. He came out an hour after the first time we talked to tell us that Colson's blood work confirmed his suspicions.

Acute kidney failure.

He said he didn't want to speculate until they ran some more tests, but it's *plausible* that this is due to the medication Colson's been taking for years. He tried adding that Colson's partying wouldn't help the situation, but I chose to ignore that bit.

This isn't Colson's fault.

Other than weed, the toxicology report came back clean. Colson wasn't on anything other than his prescribed meds. Meds prescribed by Dr. Roberts…

Here's the worst part… The part that's made it impossible for me to leave this spot for eight hours…

Because of the nature of the overdose, in hopes of preventing a stroke or something that could damage his brain, they had to put Colson into a medically induced coma.

My brother, the other half of my fucking person, is in a *coma* right now, in the intensive care unit. And I haven't been able to see him yet. I haven't seen him since they ripped his lifeless body away from me, and every second I sit out here without jumping up and storming through this hospital to find him feels like the biggest waste of breath on the planet.

I failed him. The love of my goddamn life…

I don't give a single fuck that he's my brother. It's so much *more* than that. We were meant to be together, since the idea of us was a sparkle in the eye of the universe.

Maybe it makes no sense, but so what? Not everything is made to make sense. We're not meant to understand the cosmic plan that guides our lives.

I've come to understand that I'm in love with Colson Becker, and I never won't be.

And if he doesn't come out of this, I'll never forgive myself for how badly I failed him.

I'm trying to stay positive, I really am. But after my bitch of a mother got Tauren kicked out of the hospital and almost arrested—the cops had pity on him and let him go with a warning—I began to slip. I'm completely alone in this.

Mom is *here*, but only for show. She hasn't been in the waiting area with me, because no one can see her here. She's spent the last eight hours either out in her car or wandering around the lobby and cafeteria fake sniffling. Garnering sympathy from strangers, especially the paparazzi, who, of course, found out what happened and have been parked outside the hospital for hours.

But I can't be concerned with any of that right now. I can't be concerned with *anything* other than seeing my brother. I'm going to sit in this goddamn spot until the doctor comes back.

I will not move. *I'll piss my pants if I have to.*

I have no shortage of overwhelming thoughts to keep me company, after all.

Like Dr. Roberts.

Ever since Dr. Vassar mentioned him, his name has been stuck in my brain. Tauren asked Mom about him too… And the look on her face was enough to prove her extremely suspect.

Colson's been seeing Dr. Roberts for years, since he got back from boarding school. Mom and Dad found him as part of the terms of Colson staying at home after… *what happened*. At first, I thought it might be helpful for Colson. He's always had a lot going on. *I mean, who doesn't?* But it seemed like Colson could benefit from talking to someone and, only if *completely necessary*, maybe some meds. At most, something light for his ADHD, or possible depression. Those were just my thoughts, based on my experience from Biochem studies and me being his twin fucking brother.

Dr. Roberts put Colson on meds right away, and Colson was never happy about it. But I know he takes them. As much as he hates people telling him what to do, deep down Colson craves order, and directions to follow. *Just like his relationship with Tauren.…*

But this therapy he's been in, these meds he's been on since he was sixteen, minus the year we lived in Oceanside, haven't done a single thing to help, I think that much is obvious. In fact, that year we lived with Aunt Lily, Colson seemed healthier, and more like *himself* than ever.

Since Tauren left, Mom's been forcing him to see Dr. Roberts more often, and Colson's been at an all-time low. In my mind, this can only mean one thing.

I know a thing or two about medication, after all. I'm already caught up on all my preliminary lessons for UCLA, which is a lot of chemistry, and some basic Biochemistry research. I've been reading about the effects different medications can have on human biology and neurology for a while…

This abrupt kidney failure thing is way too convenient.

And since I've had so many hours to sit here and stew, a plethora of things are now sprouting up to the surface of my mind.

Colson's weird sleep habits, his pale complexion—we're both pale, but he's definitely lost any color he had over the last few months—his frequent stomach cramps and how often he complains about feeling *nauseous*. It's the whole reason he smokes as much as he does.

At first, I thought maybe it was Crohn's or something…

I really just didn't expect it could be a medication reaction. Partly because I never knew exactly what he was taking, but also, it's inherently human to want to trust people in positions that are meant to help you. Like doctors... or your parents.

Well, all that is over. *No more* looking the other way, no more trusting anyone who isn't us. And I'll never assume he's okay again.

This whole thing is a huge wake-up call for me. And with my leg bouncing and my eyes watching the clock, I'm saying a silent prayer to whoever wants to listen…

Just let him be okay, and I promise I'll get to the bottom of this. I'll fix this for him, and get him every bit of help he needs, if it's the last thing I do.

Movement catches my dry eyes and I jump out of my seat so fast I almost trip over my own feet when Dr. Vassar steps into the room.

"Well?" I gasp before he can even open his mouth.

"He's stable," he says, and I let out the longest *whoosh* of air ever.

"Can I see him?" I plead with my eyes.

The doctor nods.

Yes. Yes yes yes, thank God.

I'm jittery as hell as one of the nursing staff brings me up to Colson's room in the ICU. Each step feels like it weighs a metric ton of emotion, but I'm practically running, pushing the girl to get us there faster.

When we reach his room, she opens the door for me and I stumble through, tears welling in my eyes instantly.

Baby…

Seeing him like this hacks open my chest with a dull blade. I'm tormented, feeling every bit of pain he must have felt to do something like he did, deep in each corner of my heart. I'm weighted with guilt, remorse, and agony. So much aching empathy, it's hard to even move.

But I do. I step up to him slowly, the beeping of the machines keeping him alive causing me to flinch.

Pulling a chair right up to the edge of his bed, I sit down by his side, looking over his beautiful face. In this moment, I don't think we've ever looked so different. He's just so pale, the dark circles under his eyes more pronounced than ever. His lips are all dry and cracked, his hair messy and sweat-slicked at his temples.

A brutal whimper leaves my lips, and I drop my face, sniffing and pulling myself together.

Be strong for him.

"Col…" My voice comes out too low and shaky. I clear my throat. "I'm here, baby. I'm right here."

Reaching out, I take his hand in mine, enveloping his long, cold fingers. The fingers that have touched me so many times, in so many ways they weren't supposed to. But I wouldn't go back, and I wouldn't trade what we've done for anything.

I will never, ever *regret you, baby.*

"I told you I wouldn't leave you," I tell him, watching his eyelids flutter ever so slightly. I wonder what he can see right now. *I wonder if he's dreaming…* "I'm right fucking here, forever, Colson. I know that you can hear me. You've always been able to, and right now I just need you to know how much I love you."

Tears glide down my cheeks while I lean forward, resting my head as gently as possible on his chest. "Wake up for me… *Please*. I just need you to wake up, Col. Because I can't live without you. My life isn't a life without you here, completing me." My right hand slides up, palm laying flat

over his heart. “This right here is a piece of *me*, too. You can’t take it away.”

My eyelids finally begin to droop, exhaustion overtaking me while I inhale the scent of my brother. *My everything.*

“Wake up, baby…” I yawn, squeezing his hand tight. “I’ll keep calling you *baby*… forever. No matter what.”

And the beeping of my brother’s pulse lulls me into an uneasy sleep.



“YOU SHOULD REALLY EAT SOMETHING,” one of the nurses, Betty, says to me with a smile in her voice.

“I’m good,” I mutter, not even looking at her.

I refuse to take my eyes off of my brother for one second. I need to be *right here*, by his side at all times, in case he wakes up. Because he’s going to. I can feel it.

Dr. Vassar said his vitals are strong, which is great, considering it’s only been a day and a half. He wants to give it until tomorrow, and if everything looks good, they’ll bring him out of the coma. Even after they do, he’ll need to stay here for kidney treatment. But at least he’ll be *awake*. I don’t want to wait one more second, but I know it’s important to listen to the doctor.

Still, I’m sitting on pins and needles.

I haven’t left Colson’s side for more than two minutes to use the bathroom since I came in here yesterday morning. The only thing I’ve eaten in two days is a pack of vending machine peanuts Betty brought me, hence why she’s badgering me about eating right now.

Food can wait. The only thing I care about in the world is in this bed.

“You know, when he wakes up, he’s gonna need you strong,” Betty rasps.

This time I glance up at her. She smirks and goes back to finishing up her tasks.

She’s about to leave when I stop her. “Hey, where are his things? I don’t have my phone. I’m wondering if his is here so I can use it.”

“It sure is,” she answers, nodding across the room at a pile of Colson’s folded clothes on a chair. “You would’ve seen that for yourself if your eyes had moved in the last thirty-six hours.”

“Ha ha,” I mumble sarcastically, standing up and stretching my arms over my head.

“I’ll see you in a few hours, sugar,” she says with a grin, leaving the room while I wander over to Colson’s things.

Picking up his shirt, I hold it up to my nose and sniff, inhaling his delicious *Colson* smell, like cinnamon and clove cigarettes. It breaks my heart in half, but also somehow seals it up all the same. Lifting his jeans, I find his phone underneath. I bring it over to my new home, also known as the chair next to my brother’s hospital bed, and plop back down.

“Alright, bro. Just know I would never normally do this without your permission,” I tell him, taking his right hand in my left. “But I need to call Tauren, and I’d prefer not to leave the room to do it.”

Pressing his thumb up to the fingerprint scanner on his phone screen, the phone unlocks immediately. But I don’t let go of his hand until I’ve placed a kiss on top of it.

Before I can even look up Tauren’s contact info, I notice that the gallery is up on the phone screen. And there’s a thumbnail of a video, the last thing recorded, which has our mother at a weird angle.

I peek at Colson, then back at the phone. “What’s this…?”

I press play on the video and watch. At first you can’t see much. It looks like it’s being recorded from down on the floor, or around a corner. Turning up the volume, I hold it up to my ear and listen.

I’m confused for only a moment before I realize this is a video recording of my mother talking to Colson’s psychiatrist. Dr. Roberts.

My eyes widen, shock and morbid disgust sweeping through my limbs at what I’m hearing.

“Remember what Dustin told you two years ago?”

Dustin… Our father.

“He told me to dope the queer out of him.”

My fingers tremble, my heart sinking down into the pit of my stomach. Saliva fills my mouth, and I seriously think I might hurl, not that anything would come out.

“If he’s in a coma, he can’t ruin our lives anymore.”

My wide eyes linger on my brother's unconscious face while I swallow over the bile trying to rise in my throat.

This is what she wanted…?

She wants her own son dead.

She did this. Her and Dad… They paid that scumbag to fuck Colson up.

The video ends and I stare down at my brother's phone for five minutes in silence. Never have I felt so many terrible things at once… Dread and anger and guilt and rage and… Pure, unbridled *hatred*.

A powerful resentment fills my body and, for a moment, I can't see. I'm *blinded* by emotions.

"I will never let her near you again," I whisper to Colson, shivering down to my core with fear and fury. "I need to get you away from her."

At that moment, I hear my mother's voice in the hallway. Panic zips up my spine and I shove the phone beneath Colson's blanket, sniffing and straightening up as Carla steps into the room.

"Oh, sweetheart, you really should get up and take a walk," she says, waltzing through the room like she owns the place. Like she gives a flying *fuck* about the condition of her son, lying helpless in the hospital because of her despicable actions. "Or better yet, go home and get some rest! The doctor will let us know when his condition improves."

I'm sick with rage, my teeth grinding together so hard I think they're snapping while I watch her fussing over the flowers that were delivered this morning. I guess the fact that we're social pariahs doesn't stop fake Solana Beach people from sending their *best wishes*. Deliveries have been coming in all morning. The only ones I know Colson would like are the black and blue spray-painted dahlias from Paris.

"I'm not leaving his side," I mumble at my mother, like a soft threat leaving my lips.

She ignores me, as usual.

Ten minutes of her babbling about bullshit later, Dr. Vassar comes into the room. It's insane how she immediately switches gears from vain gossip to concerned mother. Her face changes, her tone, even her body language.

It's disgusting. I'm having a hard time even looking at her.

"How are we doing?" Dr. Vassar asks, making his way to Colson to check his vitals.

"Just anxious." Mom fakes a shivering voice, and I want to dry-heave.

“Well, your son is very strong, Mrs. Becker,” Dr. Vassar says, checking his chart. “I think we’re good to get him out of this coma and let him wake up.”

My relief feels like a breath of fresh air. But then my eyes dart to my mother, where I find the first real flash of concern gracing her face.

“Are we sure that’s a good idea?” she asks, and the doctor glances at her. “I just mean, so soon? Doesn’t the coma help him recover?”

Dr. Vassar is quiet for a moment before speaking. “It was really only necessary to prevent brain damage. We’re in the clear for that. Now it’s just about doing all we can to reverse that kidney damage.”

“Which was a result of his medication, right?” I jump in.

“It appears that way.” Dr. Vassar nods. “It’s a curious situation… The overdose is what brought him here, but very little of the damage he’s facing is actually because of that. In a way, the overdose saved his life.” He cocks his head at my mother. “Mrs. Becker, had your son ever complained about fatigue, or stomach issues?” Mom simply shakes her head. “Has he seemed weak or lethargic lately?”

I want so badly to shout out that she’d have no idea because she doesn’t pay him any attention, and if he *did* seem that way, it was what she wanted.

But I force my lips together while my mother stutters, “No… Honestly, I thought he was doing well on his medication.”

“Well, that’s another thing,” Dr. Vassar says curiously. “We haven’t been able to get a hold of the prescribing doctor, Dr. Roberts. Which is interesting, considering that his patient overdosed on prescribed medication…”

“He’s a very busy man.” Mom smoothes out her skirt repeatedly. “I think he even said he was going out of town…”

“This is a very important matter, isn’t it, Doctor?” I ask, though my furious gaze is on my mother.

“It is, actually,” Vassar replies. “He’s going to have to come in and perform an evaluation before Colson can leave, since this was a believed suicide attempt.”

“Like I said, I’m not sure he’ll be available,” Mom argues, and I can see her mask of willful ignorance slipping just a bit.

“If he’s unable, we’ll have to bring in another psychiatrist,” Dr. Vassar says.

Mom’s head springs up. *That got her.*

Her eyes are wide as she murmurs, “I don’t think that will be necessary. I don’t want some random psychiatrist assessing my son.”

Dr. Vassar squints at her. “It’s hospital policy, I’m afraid.”

My eyes dart to Vassar for a moment. He looks like he might be catching onto something, and my hands are shaking as my fingers absentmindedly brush Colson’s arm.

“Mom, why don’t you try calling Dr. Roberts?” I ask, forcing myself to sound as normal as possible. She glares at me. “You’ve known him for years and all…”

She purses her lips in the way she does when she’s not getting her way, standing up slowly. “Alright… If you insist.”

She leaves the room in a huff, Dr. Vassar giving her a peculiar look as she goes.

“Doctor,” I whisper, standing up and nodding him over to me. “Look, I have reason to believe that this *Dr. Roberts* has been intentionally prescribing my brother harmful medication.”

Dr. Vassar looks like he wants to agree with me, but remaining professional and unbiased, he says, “That’s a very serious accusation…”

“I can confirm it even without the evidence that I have,” I tell him. “Let me see his chart.”

He gives me a look like he doesn’t expect me to understand the chart, handing it over. I read the list of Colson’s prescribed meds and I’m fucking shaking. I don’t know them all by name, but I recognize a few, and definitely the chemical titles.

“Dr. Vassar…” I puff out a laugh of incredulity, shaking my head. “Anti-psychotics and mood stabilizers?? My brother isn’t Schizophrenic.”

I witness him gulp. “It says here he was diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder…”

“Yea, that’s bullshit too, but I won’t get into that right now,” I scoff. “What are the fucking painkillers for, then?” I nod at the chart. “The opiates and anti-depressants together can seriously fuck up your digestive and respiratory systems. Not to mention how physically addictive opiates are…”

Vassar raises a brow at me. “I must admit, I’m not familiar with all of these and their side effects…”

“Yea, well I am,” I grunt. “I’m going to UCLA to study Biochemistry. I want to make medication that can help people, but if scumbag doctors like

that asshole Roberts are going to use them to hurt people, then what's the point?"

I'm so upset I'm shaking. Taking a deep breath, my eyes glide back to the Vassar who honestly looks out of his element.

"I'll have to report this," he says.

"Good. I think you should." I nod. "But in the meantime, I need you to do me a favor… *Do not* let my mother into this hospital room with my brother alone. We need security watching him at all times. Do you hear me?"

"What's this about?" Vassar mumbles, appearing nervous.

"I can't get into it right now, but just trust me. She can't be left alone with him. I have no intention of leaving his side, but just in case something happens… will you please promise me?"

He stares at me for a moment before nodding. "I'll do what I can." He turns to leave, telling me on his way out, "I'll be back in an hour to bring him out of the coma."

"Good. Thank you."

He leaves, and I let out a shaky breath. Falling back into the seat by my brother's side, I pull his phone out from under the blanket. "Don't worry, baby. I'm gonna fix this. I won't let her get away with it. She can't do this to you."

Pulling up the video again, I send it to myself, just in case. I know my mother won't have access to it, since Colson turned off all his iCloud settings after the last time she spied on him.

But then again, she still has the video of him and Tauren. *And apparently, she's going to sell it to the highest bidder.*

I close my eyes tight for a moment. *This woman is truly a fucking sociopath.*

When I reopen my eyes, I'm determined. I have a plan.

I'm going to fix this for him. It's the least I can do.

I whisper to my brother while pulling up Tauren's contact info. "I think I know someone who can get the video from her phone."

Placing a call to Tauren, I peek at my brother's face. He looks so peaceful. So beautiful and tired and perfect.

"Cyrus?" Tauren gasps, somehow knowing it was me right away. My heart thumps.

"Hey… I need your help."

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TAUREN



Pacing in a circle for hours, I’m wearing a hole in the carpet of my hotel suite.

I can’t just sit back and do nothing anymore. I’ve always been an action guy as it is, but I truly hate waiting around when the life of someone I love is on the line. This is too much…

It reminds me of when my mother was sick.

Of course cancer stole her slower, though not as slow as you’d think. But still, the helplessness was something that felt like my own personal disease. I believe it turned me into the person I am…

The person I was trying to stuff down before the twins came along.

I haven’t slept in days, not since I was kicked out of the hospital. Every time I close my eyes, I see Cyrus weeping; I feel him shivering in my arms.

I picture Colson, hurt; weak and unconscious and needing me.

I refuse to blame myself for this, especially now that I know who’s really to blame. But still, it’s difficult.

I saw the signs with Colson. I knew deep in my bones that he needed help. I saw it and I did nothing. I’m fucking culpable, maybe not fully but that doesn’t matter. I was supposed to protect him.

He’s *mine* to rescue. They both are.

And instead, what happened? I let Carla take them from me. I let her steal the gifts she’s never deserved; those two boys.

It’s fucking *slaughtering* me inside, knowing that Colson is in the hospital and I can’t see him. It feels like someone is carving pieces of my

heart out, slowly, while I lie and watch; fully awake with my chest wide open, feeling every bit of it.

I *need* to be there for him. I want nothing more than to run over there and burst into that room. I want to grab him, and Cyrus, and take them somewhere far away, where I can keep them forever; watch over them and never let anyone hurt them again.

But I can't do that. I need to be patient. After all, a plan is in place.

Cyrus called me yesterday after they brought Colson out of the coma. He's been texting me every hour with updates, but apparently, Colson hasn't woken up just yet. I guess it can take hours, sometimes even days.

I'm staying strong because I have no choice. I'm praying, manifesting my own strength, projecting positive vibes… literally whatever I can do. He *needs* to wake up.

There's no other option. There is no world without him in it.

After pacing for even more hours, until my legs give out and I fall onto the nearest piece of furniture, my phone *finally* rings with one of the calls I've been waiting for.

"Larry," I answer the phone for my lawyer. "What's the word?"

"It's done," he says, and the first smile I've felt in days graces my lips, my eyes falling shut. "They'll be moving forward soon."

"That's amazing. Thank you, Larry. How about your guy, the P.I… was he able to locate him?"

"Yea, he's still in the state. He has a house up in Newport. Apparently, he abruptly closed his practice and has been moving money around like he's getting ready to disappear."

"Yea, well, make sure he doesn't."

"Don't worry. His next stop is San Pedro, for sure."

Good. Rot in prison, Dr. Roberts.

"Thanks for everything, Larry. Really, I just…" My voice cuts out for a moment. "Thank you."

"Why do you sound like you're about to disappear yourself?" he asks, and I don't answer him. Because he already knows.

Once I'm done with him, I call Scott.

"Hey…" he answers, sounding much less enthusiastic than usual.

"Hey. So… is the deal done?"

He breathes into the phone. "Yea, it's done."

I’m relieved. Sad… Almost devastated that it’s come to this, but still… I’m glad it worked out the way it did.

Guilt winding its way up my throat, I tell him, “I told you it didn’t need to happen like this. I could’ve just stepped down…”

“No.” He jumps in. “That was never an option. Knight-Life was yours as much as it was ours. There is no company without you.”

I swallow. “Well… I guess *now* there is.”

“True,” he sighs. “Welcome to the planet Earth, powered by Amazon.”

I can’t help but huff a laugh. This wasn’t anyone’s ideal plan, but it’s better than losing our baby completely because of my shit reputation. Now Knight-Life belongs to Amazon, for the cool tune of seventy-five million dollars.

“So, early retirement?” I mumble and he laughs.

“Yea, man!” His excitement finally returns, and it makes me feel so much better. “Brad wants to buy a golf course. He’s such a loser.”

I chuckle. “You guys are so cute.”

“Ew. I knew telling you about us would be a mistake,” he grumbles.

“You gonna get married?” I tease.

“Are *you*?” he retorts, and a nervous flutter hits my stomach.

It’s still such a strange thought… The idea that I’m in love with my twin stepsons. I’m not sure that a real relationship could ever work between the three of us. It’s literally the most ridiculous thing to even think about. But then…

Thinking about it makes me feel so many things. *Exciting* things. Things I’ve never felt before for anyone or anything. Not even my business.

“We’ll see what happens,” I tell my best friend. “Hey, I just want you to know how important you are to me. You and Brad… I want you to take care of each other, okay?”

“I don’t like this,” he mutters. “I don’t like how much it sounds like you’re really leaving.”

“I have to, Scott.” I gaze over the ocean, just out of my reach. “If there’s even the tiniest chance I could somehow be with them… I need to take it.”

He’s quiet for a bit. “And you think they’ll go for it? They’re so *young*, T…”

I swallow hard. “I know. I’m not sure if it will work, but I have to try. I’m… I’m in love with them.”

“I get it.”

We end the call with me agreeing to drop him and Brad a line wherever I end up. And then I go out to the balcony and let the SoCal breeze brush my skin.

I wonder how long until things start falling apart, and how much time it'll take for me to put them back together.

And I wonder if I'll ever set foot in California again after this.



Cyrus

IT WASN'T that hard to track him down.

Sure, we've only ever spoken over PlayStation while playing video games, but still. We're internet friends, which sometimes are just as good, if not better than real life friends.

I found him on our Discord server, which was harder to do since I'm using Colson's phone, not my own. But I refuse to go home and get mine. Plus, I'm not sure that mine is even secure.

We exchange numbers, and he agrees to give me a call as soon as he's free. Only a half-hour later, the phone is ringing.

"Well well well," I answer with a grin. "If it isn't Berkley's Lex Luthor."

He laughs into the phone. "You don't have to call me by my username, dude. Just call me Luthor."

"Which also isn't your real name," I tease.

"Excuse me. Last I checked, I'm doing *you* a favor. So be nice, huh?"

"Sorry sorry." I pace around the hospital room. "You know what I need, right?"

"Yup. You were pretty clear."

"You think you can pull it off?"

He chuckles. "Do you have any idea who you're talking to?"

My grin widens. "I apologize. I'll never doubt your mad skills again."

"Thank you. Sheesh. A little respect would be nice. You did what I asked?"

“Yea. I got her to sign into the hospital’s public Wi-Fi,” I tell him, jittering in anticipation.

“Awesome. Give me like a half hour and I’ll text you when it’s done.”

“You’re the best, Luthor. Really, thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. But do I even want to know what’s on this video?”

I rub my eyes with my fingers. “Um no… And I’d prefer if you didn’t look at it. Just get rid of it. *Please*.”

“Oh, man…” he whines. “That’s like telling a kid not to press the buttons in an elevator. Now I gotta press them *all*!”

“Please don’t.” I laugh. “I promise, it’ll scar you more than anything.”

“Fine fine. I’ll text you.”

Hanging up the phone, my forehead drops to the glass of the window. **BerkleysLexLuthor** is a gamer I sometimes play with, though our games are often distracted by our heated debates on who are the superior superheroes. Or super villains, in his case, since, well, you know… *Lex Luthor.*

He also happens to be a pretty skilled hacker.

So as soon as I heard my mother talking about selling the video of me-slash-Colson having sex with Tauren to some paparazzi or gay porn website, I knew I needed to get it out of her possession and wipe it clean off the face of the earth. And he was the only person I could think of who could actually make something like that happen.

I offered to pay him, but Luthor is just a generally good guy, and he insisted on doing it for free. He just said that if he ever needs a favor, he’ll have my number on speed dial. I think I’m okay with that. *I mean, what kind of favor could he possibly need?*

With that video gone, and Tauren’s part of the plan in motion, I’ll be able to breathe a little easier.

Lifting my face to look out the hospital window, I blink at the parking lot. There are cops down there corralling the paparazzi who have been waiting to get some kind of statement about the condition of Colson Becker; the poor, troubled boy who was taken advantage of by his monster stepfather and ended up trying to kill himself.

Man, I can’t wait to fix that fucking headline.

Returning to my brother’s side like a magnet, I take his hand and squeeze it. “Wake up for me, baby. Let me see those green eyes.”

I’m worried. They brought him out of the coma last night, and he still hasn’t woken up. Dr. Vassar said it’s normal for it to take some time, but I don’t like it. I just want him to wake up. I just want him back so I can tell him…

Voices outside in the hall draw my attention, and I glance up as my mother walks into the room with a man I’ve never seen before.

“I think that’s perfect, Doctor.” My mother is smiling at the man as they come in, stepping right over to Colson’s bed.

I instinctively lean in closer, in case I need to shield him from something, while giving them both a peculiar look.

The man picks up Colson’s chart and I spring to my feet. “Excuse me, who are you?” I bark, then turn to my mother. “Who is this??”

“Cyrus, this is Dr. Fielding,” she answers me, tilting her head. “He’s a neurologist and former psychologist who’s agreed to perform Colson’s examination in the comfort of his own facility.”

“Wha… How…?” I croak, shaking my head. “How would he do that?”

“Well, since we can’t seem to locate Dr. Roberts, someone will need to perform a psychiatric evaluation, and Dr. Fielding here has a fine facility. Out in Malibu.”

“*Malibu?!*” I can’t help the way my voice leaps out of my throat. “He can’t go to Malibu!”

“We can move him,” Dr. Fielding says, lifting his eyes to mine for a split second before they return to my brother’s chart.

Lunging forward, I snatch it out of his hands.

“Cyrus!” my mother scolds, but I’m not listening.

“You’re not moving him anywhere,” I growl. “He’s perfectly safe right here. Now piss off, weirdo.”

“Cyrus Becker, what has gotten into you?” My mother eyes me in a way that I’m sure is far from genuine.

And maybe I’m paranoid, but I think she knows I’m onto her.

She knows this guy. I’m absolutely certain of that.

“You can move him… over my dead fucking body,” I seethe, narrowed glare aimed right at this *doctor*.

“Unfortunately, that’s not really an option,” Dr. Fuckface says smugly. “Because we’re moving him now.”

What?!?!

“Like hell! Nurse!” I scream, though I think nurses and Dr. Vassar were already on their way because of the commotion, sliding into the room almost instantly.

“What’s the problem in here?” Dr. Vassar asks, sounding displeased. “There shouldn’t be all this yelling around my patient.”

“*Your patient* is coming with me,” Dr. Fielding rumbles.

“Excuse me? I haven’t signed off on that,” Dr. Vassar argues. “And who the hell are you?”

“You don’t need to.” My mother steps in. “I’m legally responsible for Colson, and I’ve decided to have him moved.”

“Mrs. Becker, I strongly advise that you don’t do that,” Vassar says sincerely. “Moving him while he’s still unconscious could have severe repercussions.”

“See?” I shout at them, but everyone ignores me.

“We’ll take our chances,” my mother mutters. “Quite frankly, I’m dissatisfied with your diagnosis, and looking for a second opinion.”

“Second opinion??” Vassar snorts. “Why? Because it’s clear that you’ve overlooked your son’s wellbeing for the better part of two years?”

Oh snap! Dr. Vassar going in for the kill.

Carla gasps. “I don’t need to stand here and take this!”

Wedging myself in between them and Colson, I hiss, “He’s eighteen years old. You don’t own us anymore, Carla.”

My mother’s face morphs into one much more furious at the fact that I’m done calling her *Mom*. “Well, guess what, son of mine? I’m still listed as his legal guardian in case of emergency. Meaning, if he’s unfit to care for himself, I make his decisions.”

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck… no.

I’m freaking the hell out. My entire body is vibrating with confusion and rage so strong I’m about to fall over. I can’t let this happen…

I can’t let her take him. She’ll have him fucking killed!

My desperate gaze flies to Dr. Vassar. “You have to do something. *Please*, you know this isn’t right.”

He’s stammering, and it’s not a good sign. “I… I’m not sure there’s anything I can do…”

“Fuck this,” I grunt, rushing back to my brother. Leaning over him, I take his hand in mine and whisper to him frantically, “Col, you gotta wake up, okay? You have to wake up right now…”

“Cyrus, you’re being so dramatic,” Carla scoffs in the background, but I’m not listening to her.

I’m begging my brother to wake up. *Pleading* with him.

“It needs to be now, Col.” My forehead presses to his and I breathe, “Please, baby. Wake up.”

The sounds of footsteps clomping up the hall have me turning my head.

In stalks Tauren, with the same two big security guards who hauled him out of the hospital the other day on his tail. And two cops.

My heart nearly leaps out of my chest to greet him. I know it seems ridiculous, but it really feels like our hero just rode in to rescue us.

“What the hell is he doing back here?!” my mother shrieks at everyone. The security guards, the doctor… the cops. “I told you to keep him out, or it’d be your ass!”

Tauren seems completely unfazed by my mother’s screaming. He’s too focused on Colson, staggering over to the bed with his brows zipped in duress. He reaches out and brushes the hair back from Colson’s forehead, the sight of which is sinking my heart like a stone in the sea.

“Is he alright?” he asks me, voice hushed and overflowing with pleading concern.

I can only nod, keeping my eyes locked on his beautiful, worried face. I missed him so much, it’s overwhelming.

“Um, hello!” Carla shrills once more. “Officers, remove this man right now! I want him arrested.”

“Oh, actually, no,” Tauren mumbles, eyes still on Colson. “They’re here for you.”

His face tilts as the police officers wave my mother over.

“Ma’am, can you step out into the hall, please? We have some questions for you.”

Holy fuck, it’s really happening.

My mother looks shocked. More so than I’ve ever seen her before. It’s almost hilarious. I would laugh if I wasn’t shaking like a leaf from all this goddamn drama.

Carla’s head swivels. “No. Absolutely not. What’s the meaning of this?”

“We need to speak with you, ma’am. Right now,” the cop says again.

She looks to Dr. Fielding, who’s just standing there, bored and making a face like he really doesn’t have time for this.

“No, this is absurd!” Carla gasps. “I’m calling my lawyer.”

“That would probably be wise,” Tauren says quietly, his attention back on Colson.

His fingers are methodically grazing Col’s jaw, and I can almost feel it myself. That warm, affectionate touch I’ve missed with every fiber of my being.

“Hey, perfect,” Tauren whispers to him, and suddenly… *Poof!* Everyone else has vanished. And it’s just the three of us. How it should be. *How it needs to be.* “I missed you, you know?”

“Leave him alone! He’s coming with us!”

But the erratic shouts of my mother, the brusque commands of the police… everyone’s noise fades into the background as my brother’s black lashes, fanning over his cheeks, begin to flutter.

And he opens his eyes.

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COLSON



M *otherfucker*… My head is *killing* me.

When my eyes first open, everything is blurry. Like when you wake up too fast out of a real deep slumber, and your vision doesn't work right for a few seconds. There are shadowy figures all around me, but I can't make any of them out.

That and my head is heavy as fuck. My temples are throbbing, my throat is dry and scratchy, my stomach is rumbling so bad it feels like it's eating itself. *Jesus, I should've just stayed asleep.*

When my vision finally clears out, the first person I find is my brother. And then Tauren.

My heart jumps fast in my chest just from seeing them, verified by the machine next to me beeping like crazy. There's also a doctor and a nurse in the room…

My mother and some guy. Two cops… *What the hell is going on?*

I try to speak but I cough when the words won't come out. I feel like I've been asleep for days… But now that the fog is lifting and memories are coming back to me, I'm thinking that's exactly what happened.

"Water!" Cyrus gasps. "Get him some water! Can he have water??"

"Can he have water?" Tauren repeats the dumb question and a laugh bubbles from my throat, causing me to cough some more. They're being so ridiculous.

It gives me all the stomach flutters.

But my smile fades fast when I notice how awful they both look. Tauren's stubble is way more overgrown, and his hair is all mussed up. And

Cyrus… I mean, *shit*. It looks like *he's* the one who tried to kill himself.

I frown. *Hopefully, that's not the case.*

A nurse bustles over with a cup of water, but Tauren snatches it from her, positioning the straw to my lips so I can take a small sip. The cool liquid feels incredible on my burning throat, and I want more. But he pulls the cup back a bit and whispers, "Slowly."

My chest is on fire, but it's also being squeezed hard from the inside just at being near him again. Having him take care of me and boss me around… Warmth blooms like a flower behind my ribs.

I missed him. I can't quite remember why I did what I did, but I feel instantly stupid.

"What… what…" It's the only word that will come out.

Tauren shushes me. "Easy, love." He squeezes my hand.

My eyes dart down to it, then up at everyone else in the room. Things feel tense in here, and I'm wondering what's happening…

Why Mom is even allowing Tauren to touch me right now. And why the cops are here…

"Oh, Col," Cyrus whimpers, then launches himself at me, burrowing his face in my neck.

I try to lift my arms to hug him back, but they won't really move. *Fuck, how long have I been in this bed?*

"I was so scared," my brother whispers, his tears wetting my skin.

Pressure builds behind my heavy eyes, and I force my arms up just enough to barely wrap them around him. But as soon as they're there, I feel my strength returning, slowly. At least in my arms. And my fingers as they trail his back.

"I'm… sorry." My voice comes out jagged as hell.

"No apologies. Ever." He lifts and blinks his glistening green eyes at me.

My heart feels like it's a million times more exhausted than my body. I can't believe what I did… I can't believe I thought I could leave him.

What a selfish prick I am.

"Never again," I croak, and his brows zip. "I'll never try to… leave you again."

His bottom lip quivers, and he bites it. He looks like he wants to say so much to me, but then his eyes dart to everyone else in the room.

Something fuzzy slinks back into my brain… A memory of the last day I remember before now. Before I fell asleep.

My mother… Dr. Roberts.

The pills.

She wanted me gone. She and Dad had been paying that doctor to correct my, what did they call it…?

My afflictions*? Meaning, my love for my brother…*

The beeping at my side begins to steadily increase and the doctor rushes over, checking my vitals.

“Alright, everyone needs to leave the room now,” he says firmly, peeking at Cyrus and Tauren and whispering, “Not you two.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Mom says.

“Actually, yes you are,” one of the cops retorts, motioning for her to step forward.

“Tauren.” My voice shakes as I take both of their hands. “Don’t leave me with her.”

“Don’t worry, love,” Tauren croons, brushing my hair with his free hand. “We’re staying right the hell here.”

I nod, comforted, but not by much since the bitch who tried to kill me, my own *mother*, is still in this room, staring at me.

“There’s a video… on my phone,” I whisper to Cyrus, but he stops me.

“I know,” he says, turning to face our mother. “You’re finished, Carla.”

“You have no idea what you’re even talking about,” she growls.

Tauren glares at her. “You know they have Dr. Roberts in custody, right? Picked him up an hour ago. He was ready to flee the country. I wonder why…”

He stands up and walks over to her slowly while she visibly trembles, face having dropped and paled.

“Your own son, Carla?” Tauren’s head cocks as he gets right up in her face. “Paying a doctor to misdiagnose him… Drug him for years, slowly poison him?? I might not be a good person, but you’re pure *evil*.”

“Shut the fuck up,” she hisses. “You’re forgetting one small detail, Tauren. I still own that video. The video that ruined your life, your career. And soon, it’ll be all over the internet. So get ready, babe. You’ll be labeled a pervert for the rest of your life.”

“I don’t give a fuck what anyone says about me.” Tauren shakes his head. “I only care about two things in this world.”

He peeks at Cyrus and me and I can’t help but swoon. I don’t care what any of these assholes think either.

“Fuck ’em,” I whisper, looking to Cyrus.

He smiles and squeezes my hand. “Fuck ’em all.”

“You won’t be saying that when your precious sex tape gets out!” Carla scoffs. “I still have it, after all.”

Cyrus glances down at the phone by the end of the bed, then back up at Mom. “No, you don’t.”

Her face morphs into one of pure wrath. The lines she tries so desperately to have frozen all come back, contorting her into a psycho demon bitch as she lunges toward the bed.

“I fucking hate both of you!”

Tauren blocks her before she can get to us, the security guards and the cops clamoring into the room to practically tackle her.

All the shouting echoes in my head, bringing on a swift migraine I have to cover my ears to contain.

“Fuck you, Tauren Vance!” Carla bellows as the police carry her out of the room, kicking and screaming. “You can have those loser kids! They’re fucking worthless!”

Total psycho, man. I’m telling you.

“Yea, bye, *Mom*.” I wave toward the door.

I’m not sure if it was the overdose or what, but I’m too tired to even feel disappointed. I think somehow all the pain of knowing she’s hated me my entire life was washed away, and now I’m just over it. I never want to see or think about her again. I just keep squeezing my brother’s hand, holding onto my lifeline while our mother—*my attempted murderer*—is hauled out of my hospital room by the police.

“Wow…” I mumble, with Cy and Tauren’s eyes on me. “Guess I woke up just in time.”

Tauren smiles, and Cyrus does the same. It looks like rays of sunshine are beaming into the room around them.

I know I probably shouldn’t feel good right now, but I do. My body is aching and heavy, but my mind… My mind feels better than it has in a long time.

“You need to leave too,” the doctor in the lab coat says to the other random guy standing in the room. “Don’t let me catch you in this hospital again.”

The guy leaves without a word, and I peek at Tauren and my brother.

"Long story," Cy murmurs, holding my hand in between both of his. "I'll tell you later."

The doctor lets out a puff of breath. "Well, aside from all that drama, welcome back, Mr. Becker. You gave your family a good scare."

My forehead lines while I gaze up at Tauren and Cyrus… The men I love. Because I do… *Love* them. I can't fucking help it. When I look at them, it's the strongest, most overpowering sense of need that I've ever felt.

And I think they love me back. No, I *know* they do. That's why they're here.

It just makes me wish I hadn't done what I did…

I know I can't take it back, but I *wish* I could.

My lips part, but Cyrus places his finger over them and shakes his head. I can hear what he's thinking. *No more apologies.*

"So, Doctor, how is everything looking?" Tauren asks. "How much longer will he need to be on treatment?"

Treatment? I think the doctor can tell I'm confused because his face grows serious. "Colson, you've suffered from some minor kidney failure, we think as a result of the medications you were taking, and the abnormally high doses."

"Dr. Roberts…" I rub my eyes.

I feel like such an idiot. I can't believe I didn't bitch smack that asshole when I had the chance. Not only has he been messing with my body, he's been fucking with my head. Making me think the way I felt was wrong. Maybe my feelings for Cyrus are complicated, but that has nothing to do with my sexuality. *There's nothing fucking wrong with being gay.*

"He's in custody, Col," Tauren tells me, likely noting the dismal look on my face. He gently caresses my leg through the blanket covering me, and it feels wonderful. "He can't hurt you anymore. None of them can."

He means my mother and father, too. *Jesus, this is fucked up.*

"Fortunately, the kidney failure was minimal," the doctor goes on. "We'll have to keep you here for a few days to possibly a week, on dialysis, monitoring your progress."

"And if it goes well?" Cyrus asks. "Just antibiotics, right?"

A painful chuckle scrapes out of me. "Doogie Howser, M.D."

Cyrus smirks while Tauren pokes me.

“And you call *me* old?” He grins. “That show came out before you were born.”

“It’s on Hulu, grandpa,” I rumble through a soft laugh. “Plus, I like Neil Patrick Harris. He’s one of us.” Cyrus laughs out loud while Tauren squints at me. “A *performer*.”

“Ahh of course.” Tauren nods, his smile unrelenting.

The doctor ignores us and steps toward the door. “I’ll be back in the morning to check on you again. In the meantime, the nurses will get you anything you need. I recommend trying to eat, but nothing too heavy.” His lips curl. “Good to have you back with us, Mr. Becker.”

He turns to leave but Cyrus stops him. “Dr. Vassar… Thank you.”

He gives my brother a curt smile, and then he’s gone.

And I’m finally alone with the only two people I want to be with in the entire world.

Cyrus wastes no time climbing into the bed with me, minding the IV running up my arm. He nestles into my side, hugging me like he never wants to let me go.

I never want him to.

Tauren comes to sit in the chair next to the bed, fluffing my pillow and fiddling with my blanket. “Do you want me to get you anything? Are you hungry? Thirsty?”

My head shakes while I gaze up at his face, wonder and awe beaming through my eyes right at him. I feel like such a corny loser, but I can’t help the hearts I see floating around his head. It’s like the overdose lifted the veil that was over my eyes.

Maybe I’m just too tired to fight it anymore… Or maybe now I can really see what’s in front of me. The love and affection I’ve always secretly wanted; that which I’ve been desperately chasing. It’s a butterfly and I’m the kid with the net.

Choosing to distract myself from the heaviness, I ask, “How did you… What happened? With Mom?”

Cyrus mumbles, “I found the video on your phone…”

“He sent it to me. I gave it to my lawyer to bring to his contact at the police department.” Tauren fills in the blanks. “They were only going to question her, and make sure to keep her away from you, just in case. But she’s Carla, so, you know… now she’s in jail.”

We all chuckle at that, then pause, wondering if we should feel bad.

Turns out we don't. *Not even a little.*

"It really sucks…" I whisper. "Having no good parents."

"What about me?" Tauren hums.

I can't help the hoarse laugh that jumps out of me. "That's kind of creepy, Tauren. All things considered."

He chuckles, then shrugs. "I don't even care anymore. I'm done fighting it. I'm done pretending…" His eyes shine at us, iridescent blue shallowing my breaths. "I want to take care of you. Both of you. I'm not saying I want to be your dad, because you're right, that's super weird."

I smirk, then bite my lip. "Why is it weird…?" *I want to hear him say it.*

His smile goes thermonuclear. "Because I desperately want to fuck your brains out."

Oh, how my toes curl at that.

"Then I guess that would make you our… *Daddy*." My eyebrows wiggle and Cyrus snorts a laugh.

Tauren is trying desperately hard to keep his control, but I can see how elated he is that we're back together and teasing. "Behave, perfect. You're too weak for me to properly punish right now."

I bite my lip, Cyrus and I both sort of squirming together.

"But that's not all…" Tauren sighs, going on. "I also love you."

My heart stops. I swear to God, the beeping pauses for a full second, literally skipping a beat.

Cyrus gapes at him, and my eyes are wider than they should be considering how sleepy I am.

"Do you… *Really*?" I stammer.

He nods. "I realized it when I thought I might have lost you… When I thought I might never…" He pauses and clears his throat. "I love both of you. And I will never, *ever* let anything like his happen to you again. You boys changed my life, even if it's a change I never expected, one I never knew I'd want. You showed me who I truly am." He hovers over me and my brother, holding each of our jaws in his hands. "I want you to be mine. *My* boys. My good… and my bad."

Everything around me feels warm and weighted; colorful, like we're in a rainforest surrounded by tropical flowers. My pulse is jumping wildly, my palms growing sweaty as Tauren, the man I thought I hated, leans in and kisses my lips softly.

Out in the open, for people to see.

Then he does the same to Cyrus, so close that I can feel him as he does. It's like we're *one*, just like we're supposed to be. Together against the wishes of everyone but us.

The bad that's turned out so damn good.

And I know it doesn't make any sense, none of it does. But I want to be with them. The two people who truly see me, as more than just Cyrus's brother, or the troublemaker. The bad twin.

Tauren's voice from weeks ago rings in my mind. *You're perfect the way you are.*

I want to bend to him, to be everything he wants. I want to worship him, Cyrus and me together. We could be two halves of the perfect whole, for *him*.

"I love you, Tauren," Cyrus whispers as the three of us huddle together in my hospital bed. "I've loved you for a long time, since pretty much the first time I saw you. I think for me, loving you was inevitable. Just like us…"

He shifts so that our eyes are locked head-on. I'm overwhelmed by the emotion I feel. It's creeping all over me, and there's nowhere to run.

I can't hide from it anymore. It's time to accept it; the unconditional *love* they're giving me.

"I've been in love with you since before I even knew what love was," Cyrus says to me quietly, freeing himself from his own chains. Breaking out of them right before my eyes. "I wanted to tell you… I *should* have. But I've always been so afraid. So fucking scared of what it would mean. Of how it could change our lives. And then I almost lost you…" Tears well in his eyes, while mine do the same. It's too much, and I try desperately to blink them away. "The thought of living the rest of my life without you… And never having told you the *truth*? It ate me up inside. It broke me down to nothing. I promised you while you were unconscious that if you woke up, I would tell you I love you… And call you *baby* forever, no matter who's listening. I'll never stop loving you, Colson Becker."

I snort a boogery chuckle and he smiles wide, wiping his eyes.

"We're being so corny," I hum, squeezing his hand as tight as possible.

He nods. "I know, and I don't care." He takes my jaw in his hands. "I don't care if it's fucked up. I don't care if it's wrong. I don't give a good God damn what anyone thinks as long as I have you. We're meant to be together, B. No matter what."

“No matter what…” I whisper and nod, tears sliding down my cheeks while he kisses me.

Soft and sweet and full of love. Out in the *fucking* open.

And I know it will probably get us in trouble. We could be condemned, chased out of society for this. But I *don’t fucking care*.

I’m so tired of pretending. So sick of acting like I’m not in love when I so obviously am. I always have been, strong and heavily in love with Cyrus Becker. We’ve tried to fight it, to push it away, or keep it in the dark, but it’s too beautiful to be hidden away like that.

We were wrong all along, and I don’t fucking care anymore. *No one will ever love him the way I was born to.*

“I want to get out of here,” I sniffle. “I don’t want to be here anymore.”

“It’s only another week, baby.” Cyrus brushes my hair with his fingers. “Until your kidneys are better.”

“No, I mean *here*. Like in this town. With all these judgmental people. All these people who think they know us, when really they don’t have a fucking clue.”

The room goes quiet for a moment while I consider this place we’re in. I do love California, but let’s face it… We don’t have many happy memories here.

My father beating the shit out of me, him being sent to jail. The paparazzi chasing us around, my mother and my doctor trying to poison me to death.

All the fights and the screaming, the neglect and the hurt. The pain that consumed me for so long.

The bad definitely outweighs the good.

“If you could go anywhere in the world,” Tauren asks, running his fingers along my arm and Cy’s back, “where would you go?”

My mind instantly finds one very good memory.

The breeze on my face. My brother’s fingers threaded in mine, his laughter…

“I want to see more Ferris wheels with you.” I speak softly, peeking at Cy. “Ones that are bigger and better than the Pacific Park. Like maybe the one in London… There’s also supposedly an awesome one in Japan. Seattle, I think…”

“Melbourne,” Tauren says and my eyes dart to his. “In Australia. I’ve always wanted to go there.”

“Ooh! Niagara Falls!” Cyrus gasps.

My smile matches his, his eyes reflecting the memory back to me… of the Santa Monica pier that day. *Fuck everyone else in the world. It’s me and you, baby. Ride or die.*

“Let me take you,” Tauren says, his voice quietly sincere. We both give him identical looks like he’s nuts, and he laughs. “I’m being serious. Let me whisk you away, my loves. Let’s get away from all this bullshit and just… *be*.”

“Be what?” My words come out shaky, because I’m nervous. My insecurities are strong, especially now that I’m off my meds, knowing that my head is messed up and I’m not sure why…

After everything that happened… *What if they decide they don’t want me anymore?*

“Be *us*,” Tauren says. “Colson, Cyrus, and Tauren. The three people who aren’t supposed to be anything together, but are anyway. Let’s stick our middle fingers up and tell the world to fuck off.”

Cyrus grins, biting it off his lip. “You would do that for us?”

“I’m already there.” He shrugs. “We sold Knight-Life.” Cyrus actually gasps. “I’m selling the house… Your mother might end up in jail.”

“Good riddance,” I mumble.

“Basically, I have nothing tying me here but you two, and I want both of you more than I want anything else in the world.” He picks up both of our hands, kissing our knuckles. “The question is, would *you* leave for *me*? And you don’t have to say yes. You two have lives here. You have plans, and I don’t want to derail that. It’s completely up to you.”

He’s saying both of us, but I know really, he means Cy. Cyrus is the one with the bright future at UCLA. He’s the one with strings attached. Mine were cut a long time ago.

My brother shakes his head solemnly. “I don’t want to go to UCLA anymore.”

My head springs in his direction. “Say what now??”

“I’m being serious,” he sighs through a contended chuckle. “After what happened at graduation, and then this whole experience…” He looks around the hospital room. “The world is a fucked-up place, and life is so damn short. I don’t want to waste it. I love both of you, and I’ll do anything to keep that.”

“Cyrus…” Tauren breathes. “You need to take some time and think about this. You’re too smart to throw it away on a relationship.”

The way he says the word *relationship* sends a swarm of crazy butterflies to my gut. *Could we even do this?? Is it completely crazy?*

Don’t answer that.

“In case you haven’t noticed, this isn’t just any relationship.” Cyrus rests his head on my shoulder. “This is family. Heart and home, and everything we’ve ever wanted, both of us. And who knows? Maybe I’ll go to school someday. But for right now, I think we need to explore.” My brother’s fingers brush mine. “Let’s get the fuck out of the stifling town that’s held us down for so long and go… run free.”

Something flashes over Tauren’s face. His wide blue eyes sparkle like where the sky meets the sea, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat. Taking our hands, he pulls them both forward, holding them up to his chest.

“So what do you say, my twins?” He smirks, head cocking as his eyes offer a whole new world of possibilities.

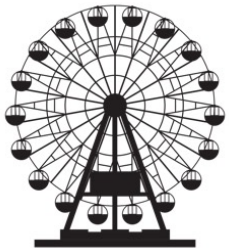
Cyrus and I share a look, excitement running through us like a current, together.

This is it.

The baddest good.

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TAUREN'S EPILOGUE



6 months later…

The waves are massive.

The current sucks me in while I swim through them, my board in my grip as I await the perfect moment. The cool, clear blue waters lift me, and my muscles are ready. My body pauses in wait…

Just… one… more…

Now! I hop up onto the board, standing firm while I ride the wave, cruising it the way Cyrus cruises down the big hills on his longboard. Knees bent, arms out for balance, I cut through the water. It reminds me of Colson on his guitar. How his fingers move, effortlessly plucking the strings.

In his zone.

This is mine.

This right here is *living*.

I hold it until I get close enough to the shore, and then I slide off, crashing into the water. When my head pops back up, I hear hoots and hollers, and I can't help but grin. *They're so cute.*

Swimming to shore, I bring my board out of the water, feet pounding on the soft sand to the sounds of applause from my boys.

"Yea, T! Get some!" Cyrus shouts.

"That was hot," Colson adds after a whistle.

Dropping my board with a thunk, I take a bow. "Why thank you. Thank you very much."

Our faces are beaming, rays of sunshine bathing us on this private stretch of beach. We're living in a house I rented on the Gold Coast in Australia, which also happens to give us a very secluded half-mile of beach where we can do pretty much whatever we want, without worry of prying eyes.

It's a prerequisite when we look for our rental properties.

Four months ago, the boys and I packed up and left California. It was definitely the right decision.

The media attention after everything that happened was overwhelming, to put it mildly. The news of Carla and Dustin paying Dr. Roberts to misdiagnose and poison Colson somehow broke and after that, the headlines changed from vilifying me, to victifying Colson—*I don't care if it's not a word, it works.*

There was a trial during which it was exposed that Carla and Dustin were attempting to use medication to cure Colson's sexuality, which was just the most abhorrently disgusting thing I'd ever heard of. Fortunately for my loves, what the media didn't pick up on was that they're real reasoning was to purge Colson of his deep love for his biological twin brother.

Of course it didn't work, and it never would. Sexuality isn't a disease, and fuck anyone who would ever think something so heinous. Love is fucking love, no matter what.

My bad twin is a badass motherfucker. All the shit he endured from that doctor rolled right off, and he came out stronger than ever. He was done with dialysis in a matter of four days, at which point I took him and Cyrus home. That was when things got really crazy.

The boys' phones exploded. They'd long since deleted all their social media accounts, but it didn't matter. Reporters were parked outside the house every day, begging for a comment on all the drama our family had been through. The public wanted to know that Colson was okay. They saw him as a hero. And believe it or not, there were a few groups of people who loved me, too.

You may have seen the Adopt me, Step-Daddy memes…

Anyway, it was important to everyone that Colson be a part of the trial to put Carla and Dr. Roberts away… Everyone but Colson.

He wanted no part of it. The attention, the media circus, the Buzzfeed articles, the TikToks, and the tweets that made it all the way to the *Tonight*

Show. Everyone was desperate to hear from Colson and Cyrus, and even me. But all we wanted was Colson's health and safety.

It was the only thing that mattered.

The team of lawyers proceeded with the case without calling Colson as an actual witness, though he did write a letter, which was read in front of the jury. According to Larry, there wasn't a dry eye in the entire courtroom.

Dr. Roberts was stripped of his medical license and sentenced to ten years in federal prison for attempted murder. Coincidentally, the same place where Dustin Becker is still rotting for his crimes. They actually added eighteen months to his sentence because of his part in hiring Roberts.

And Carla… My ex-wife and the terrible mother of the loves of my life…

She was sentenced to three years for conspiracy to commit murder, and is currently moping her way around CIW. Before we left, she reached out a couple of times, asking if the boys would come visit her. *For closure*, she'd said.

They were not interested.

Things were really tense for a while there, and the whole time, we knew the conversation we'd had in Colson's hospital room was where our hearts truly lied. We wanted to leave… To go and just have fun. And most importantly, I needed to protect my boys at all costs.

To keep them away from the prying eyes of society and let them be *them*.

So I booked us a suite in Ontario, and two weeks later, we were in Niagara Falls, and I was laughing while Colson and Cyrus screamed *fuck you* from the top of the SkyWheel.

We'd left California, calling it a *vacation*, but it was open-ended. We stayed in Canada for a month, exploring between Toronto and Montreal. And then we decided to hit up Japan.

The luxury rental suite in Tokyo was incredible. Actually, everything about Tokyo was incredible and Cyrus was in anime heaven. But of course, the main reason we went was for the Ferris wheel. The one there is called the Big O, which of course, we all had a great laugh about.

The tradition also seems to get better each time. I was laughing so hard I almost keeled over watching the confused faces of the people who got off after them, having listened to the boys' voices echoing the words *fuck you* at the top of the Tokyo sky.

We're pretty used to getting weird looks at this point. Plus, people don't seem to mind what you do when you shovel fistfuls of cash their way.

Japan was amazing, and we stayed for three weeks. But our next stop was the Melbourne Star.

We did our thing in the city. The boys yelled at the world from high atop the Star, and we stayed in a suite for a couple of weeks. But rather than bouncing to the next Ferris wheel on our list, we made a detour to Queensland.

I'd always wanted to surf somewhere on the Gold Coast, and I ended up finding us the most spectacular secluded rental property just north of Surfer's Paradise, in a place called Victoria Point, where we've been living for the last six weeks. It wasn't necessarily part of the plan to settle in somewhere. Not yet, anyway.

But we've just been so happy here.

The three of us have always been beach people. I think it's good for the soul, sun and ocean air. And maybe I'm biased because the surfing is *ridonculous*, but honestly, I'm about to have us all committed from how much we all laugh and smile. It's like we're psychotic, or high or something.

I'm definitely high on them, I can tell you that much.

Dropping onto my knees in the sand, I take Cyrus's foot in my hand and massage it while he reclines in his fancy beach chair, reading some new graphic novel he's really into. The easy smile pulls at his lips while he wiggles his toes in my hand.

Melodies pick back up, and I glance at Colson while he plays, fingers whipping up the chords in a way that's almost as hypnotizing as the music he creates.

"Mmm." I lean up on the chair between Cy's legs, draping them over my shoulders while I watch the ocean. "I love this one."

"You should. It's about you," Colson mumbles.

My face tilts in his direction, brows zipped. "Really?"

That's the first he's mentioned this song being about me…

Colson's been writing music a lot recently, and he even started writing some lyrics. It's a part of his therapy, which he does remotely over Skype. He was understandably skeptical of seeing another psychiatrist, but he also came to Cyrus and me in tears shortly after we first got here.

“I know I need help…” he’d whimpered while I held his head in my lap, stroking his hair, and Cyrus played with his fingers. “My brain gets all stuffy and I feel so tired sometimes… I don’t want to ruin our time here, but… I don’t feel well.”

“You could never ruin anything, baby,” Cyrus told him, comfort and concern lining his tone.

“Listen to me, perfect. I know you’re nervous about talking to another doctor, but I promise you, I can find you someone good,” I had whispered to him, giving him surety in my voice. “You don’t even need to decide on meds right away. Just talk first and see how it goes.”

He agreed. And after a few sessions with Dr. Luisa Stegney, who diagnosed Colson with Bipolar Depression and inattentive ADHD, he was on some low-grade meds, as strictly a trial period. That was weeks ago, and he really seems to be doing well. He loves talking to Dr. Stegney, he’s calm and collected, we’ve been mediating and doing yoga in the mornings, and he smiles constantly. Although that could be a symptom of where we are, and this beautiful life we’re living.

The deep love and mind-altering sex definitely don’t hurt.

“Yea. You ready?” He repositions himself like he means business.

Cyrus puts down his book and we both give Colson our full attention.

He starts from the beginning, strumming the song we’ve heard him playing for the last couple of weeks. But when he gets past the intro, he begins to sing…

“Where did you come from, holder of my chains?

You’re rushing my blood and my pulse.

Where do you leave to, holder of my heart?

I can sleep right, you know, No one else…

Breathes me like you, you believe me like you. Do you see me? You do, all the time.

In darkness and light, we’re so wrong, but it’s right, and I’ll never be the same, wicked you…

Are so perfect, in control, the way you mold me to your soul. Break me down and pick me up in your big hands.

Kiss me dizzy and fuck me numb. Never leave me, bad hero, baby. Never leave…”

My chest is tight. I can barely breathe. Not to mention Cyrus is digging his fingers into my shoulder so hard I’ll have bruises.

Colson is still playing, though his smooth, grungy voice is no longer singing. But I can still hear him… Those lyrics. Those words he wrote for *me*…

I'm stunned, and… *Holy fuck*, I'm in love with him. *So hard.*

He glances up at us while he strums the last chord, his cheeks flushed as he bites his lip. "So? What do you think…?"

"Col, I…" My words disappear, my head shaking over and over. I'm fucking speechless.

"Colson, that was incredible," Cyrus whispers, the hearts in his eyes for his other piece giving me chills.

"Thanks. It's not done yet, but… Thanks," he mumbles, looking down. Still struggling with accepting love and praise from people. It's a work in progress, but I know he's getting better. I've been working with him behind closed doors, after all.

Crawling over to him, I pull him effortlessly off the chair, onto my lap. He thrusts his guitar quickly out of the way, wrapping his legs around my waist and resting his forearms on my shoulders. Our eyes meet, vibrant green and effervescent blue, holding onto each other for dear life.

"Those words…" My fingers graze his sharp jaw. "They're for me?"

He nods, stifling a smile. "I call it *Bad Hero Baby*. 'Cause, ya know… You're not the good guy." He smirks and I laugh. "But you saved me. You saved us."

I can't wait one more second, yanking him to my mouth, our lips sealing together in all this unexpected love. It's absolutely bonkers for me to even think about being here right now… In a strange land with two boys I shouldn't have… Loving them deep, down into my foundation.

"I love you, Tauren," Colson whispers, breathless on my mouth, my cock thumping beneath him.

He doesn't say the *I love you* words as much as Cyrus and I do, but we know it's not because he doesn't feel them. Colson is a mass of complexities, scars running deep into his being. But with us, he gets to just be him. And *him* is goddamn fucking incredible.

"I love you, sweet perfect," I tell him, hauling him closer so that our warm flesh presses together.

When we pull apart, we both aim our hooded gazes at Cyrus, who's waiting patiently with his plump lip between his teeth.

“Come, precious,” I growl at him, and he does right away. *Never any hesitations from my good twin.*

I stand up with Colson in my arms, his legs wrapped around my waist as Cyrus sidles in close to me. Without another word, I bend and grab him by the waist, hoisting him over my shoulder.

The both of them burst into fits of laughter while I carry my big pile of long limbs and muscular torsos back to the house.

It’s a good thing I’m strong enough to hold them both.

When we get inside our little bungalow, I bring them into our bedroom and toss them onto the bed, both of them grinning wide, breathing heavily and instantly writhing into each other. Colson grabs Cyrus by the jaw and kisses him, the two of them making out in such a sensual and wicked display, I have no choice but to watch for a moment in awe.

Everything about what we do together is a perfect imbalance. Like a double-edged sword. One side for love, protection, and coming out as exactly who the fuck we all are. And the other for the rough stuff. The hardships we’ll always have to face because of this relationship.

But to me, it doesn’t really matter how complicated things get, because it makes us that much stronger. The intricacies of life are what make it exciting, anyway. The illustrious labyrinth of joy and ruin. It’s exactly the kind of thing I spent my life running from… And now I run to.

Instead of just the light… I also get to be *their* dark. And they get to be mine.

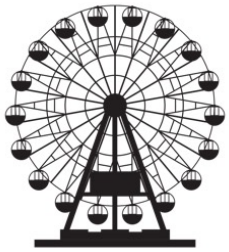
Not many people could understand it, which is why I think it’s so compelling. Just as the good can be evil, the wrong can be right, and that’s what I’ll spend the rest of my life celebrating if I can… The rest of the night praising worship to their gloriously tempting bodies.

They’ve helped me bring the bad out of my good, the villain out of my hero.

And there’s nothing fucking *wrong* with that.

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COLSON'S EPILOGUE



"Cheerio, old chap!"

My brother bursts into the room, bringing many things with him.

One, his ridiculous scally cap he insists on wearing everywhere here in London. Two, his borderline offensive attempt at an English accent. Three, a bunch of rainwater from outside because it never stops raining here. And four, the smell of the most delicious pastries from the place across the street that instantly pools my mouth with saliva.

I'm serious, that place is like a bakery straight out of heaven. *And our rented townhouse is directly across the road!* Meaning we get to smell them baking all their delicious delicacies, which is my new favorite scent ever. *Except, of course, the scrumptious scents of the men I love.*

Forcing my excited grin into a scowl because it's part of my brand, I rush over to my brother, not wanting to miss the opportunity to kiss the rain off his lips while he smells like chocolate croissants.

My hands curl around the nape of his neck, my forehead bumping the brim of that stupid cap out of the way while my mouth attacks his; slowly, cherishing in how desperately *hungry* I am.

Things have been interesting since we left Australia. We stayed there mainly because we enjoy being hermits and sticking to ourselves, and there was really no one around that little bungalow. Honestly, I'm sure Tauren could have stayed in Queensland forever, just surfing and grilling seafood and fucking us senseless, sometimes five times a day.

But part of our plan when we packed up and left Solana Beach was to explore. To go on adventures, see the world, whilst simultaneously telling it

to fuck itself from the top of famous Ferris wheels.

We already did Australia. It was time to move on, and our next wheel on the list was the infamous London Eye.

We've been living in London for almost three weeks, and we still haven't made it to the Eye because it's been raining literally since the day we arrived.

I can feel Tauren constantly wanting to give me that little side-eye he does that means, *I told you so.* Because he warned us that London in spring could be sort of gray and yucky. But I don't mind. On the contrary. I love it.

It's not that I don't enjoy beach life. I do. But I also like seeing new places and having new experiences, like living in a place that's cold and gray and wet. *If we only went to places that were sunny and tropical, then what would have been the point of leaving Cali, right?*

On the low, I really like this weather. It'll clear up enough to go to The Eye eventually, and when it does, it's flip off London time.

In the meantime, being here is definitely different from being tucked away in Victoria Point. For one, there are actually people here. And lots of them. Not that there weren't people in Australia, but we were far enough away from them that they didn't matter. We could lie on the beach naked, give each other blowies out in the open, kiss and touch and naked wrestle—yes, that's a thing we like to do, and it's really fun because it *always* ends in orgasms—and no one was around to witness it.

But here, it's a bit different. If we go out on dates or stroll the cobblestone streets holding hands, people stop and stare. Maybe partially because we're men, but mostly because it's obvious that Cyrus and I are twins. And while it might be fine for Tauren to date either one of us, it throws people the fuck off to find him dating us both, at the same time.

It's okay, though. I mean, we knew this would be a challenge. There's no real way to sustain a relationship out in the open with your twin brother. It's basically as taboo as taboo can get, and so even though we say *fuck you* to everyone, we spare ourselves the Frankenstein's monster treatment, and keep our PDA strictly inside the townhouse.

Which is exactly why I'm desperately pawing at him right now. We went out all day, just the two of us, to museums and seeing some sights, which was like five long hours of foreplay. I came back early to get some work done while Cyrus went to the bakery for me.

And now he’s here, and he smells so damn good. And tastes even better. We can finally kiss and touch again, and I’m going out of my fucking mind.

“Don’t you still have to record?” he hums into my mouth, dropping the bags onto the floor while I press him up against the wall, grinding myself into him, letting him feel how ever-loving hard he makes me.

“It can wait,” I growl, ripping his wet clothes off. “I fucking need you, good twin. So damn bad.”

“I want you, *bad*,” he moans, backing us up into the living room.

“You want your legs in the air, baby?” I push him onto the couch, yanking my shirt over my head and immediately going for my pants while he squirms out of his own, needy and rock-hard and leaking for me.

Cyrus nods, his pupils blown out and his cheeks flushed.

Coming back over him, I grab him by his thighs. “Mmm… you want me to eat you out, tasty snack?”

“Fuck yes. *Colson*…” he whines my name and my dick pulses.

I waste no time spreading my brother open and eating the fuck out of his ass, slow and passionate, because he’s a feast and he needs to be savored.

But also, because my Sir is watching, and I need to put on a good show for him.

I’m not sure exactly where Tauren is right now, but that’s the point. He’s *everywhere*, because he’s in charge all the time. He’s our guardian, our protector, our lover. Our Dom.

He’s everything, and the completing party to this strange little threesome we’ve become.

I’m grumbling and grunting into Cy’s ass while he puckers beneath my tongue, his big dick throbbing and dripping everywhere from how much he loves having his ass eaten. And when I’ve had my fill, I reach for the lube we have stashed in the couch, squeezing a generous helping onto my cock. I want to play slip-n-slide in my brother’s warm, tight ass right now. I want to *hear* how wet he is.

Positioning between his legs, I hold Cy’s throat while nudging my cock into him. He welcomes me right away, but I go in slowly, watching my thick cock disappear into his hole.

My head tips back when I reach bottom. “Fuck, baby, your ass is heaven.”

When my eyes reopen, I spy Tauren in the hallway that leads to the bedroom. He's leaning up against the wall, shirtless, dressed in only sweatpants, as he usually is at home. And he's watching me with the most intense burning blue flames in his eyes… I almost catch from here.

He nods, and I already know what it means. He wants me to pretend he isn't here.

We have this sort of unspoken language, the three of us. This uncanny ability to read each other's thoughts, although it's different between all of us. Cy and I have always been able to do so. Like a twin thing. Cyrus and Tauren are so similar in so many ways, they almost have this sort of Dom/Sub telepathy. And Tauren and me… Well, ours is a chemistry so strong it somehow allows us to read each other.

It's overpowering, but marvelous all the same. I'm obsessed with the connection between the three of us; separately and together. It truly is wild.

My eyes stay with Cy's as I move in between his legs, pumping into him as deep as I can go before my fucking balls slip inside him, then pulling back to the tip.

"Every… inch…" Cyrus whines, hoarse, back arched and needy for me.

"You love it, don't you?" I grumble at him, my hands caressing his chest, playing with his nipples while my cock moves in and out of his ass.

"*God*, I do," he gasps. "Take me for a ride on your huge dick, Col."

I'm fucking him so hard the couch is moving with my heavy thrusts, sweat trickling down my temple. I can tell Cyrus is going to come soon—nothing makes him come faster than being fucked rough and deep. And watching him come while I'm inside him always sets me off, so we're probably about to tumble any minute.

And at exactly the right moment, because this is what he does, Tauren steps into the room. And I know things are about to get much naughtier.

I watch him in my peripheral while teasing Cy's eager erection with my fingertips. Tauren rounds the couch, leaning down to press an upside-down kiss on Cyrus's lips. Then he comes up to my side and grasps my face, kissing me hard while I pant into his mouth.

"Tell me what you want me to do, perfect," he whispers in my ear, his tongue extending to graze the lobe.

I can't help the partially baffled look I give him. He's always the one in charge. But now he wants me to tell him what to do…

A chill rushes through me at the idea.

“I want to watch you take Cyrus’s load in your mouth while I fuck it out of him,” I whisper.

Tauren’s eyes meet mine and they sparkle. “Mmm… good idea. I’m hungry for dessert.”

He gives me a gentle smack on the ass that makes my balls hum before wandering back over to the edge of the couch.

“Stop,” I tell him, and he does, raising a brow at me. “I want him to suck you at the same time.”

He looks down at Cyrus who’s already drunk on the feeling of me riding his ass, gazing up at Tauren in so much coiled need I know it’s only a matter of minutes before he snaps. My brother immediately opens his mouth, and Tauren lets out a soft noise.

“You two will be the death of me,” he murmurs, pushing his pants down to reveal his thick, meaty cock.

“Hashtag twinning.” I smirk, and he gives me a devious look.

He shoves his dick up to Cy’s lips, breathing, “Here’s your meal, precious little slut. I want it all the way down that tight throat of yours.”

Cy’s ass clenches on my dick so hard I almost skid to a halt.

Tauren feeds his cock into Cy’s mouth, gently at first before he begins flicking his hips, giving my brother more and more to suck. Then he bends and drapes himself over Cyrus’s writhing body, grabbing his dick from where it’s bobbing on his abs, leaving a puddle of precum in his belly button.

Tauren’s eyes meet mine as he seals his lips over Cyrus’s head, sucking him so hard Cy’s toes curl where his feet are up in the air. I can practically hear his rumbly brogue whisper, *delicious*.

I keep pumping into Cy’s ass while Tauren matches my tempo, humping his throat, all the while sucking up and down on his cock so thoroughly, I can almost feel it myself. Tauren looks like a goddamn *dream* sucking dick. The way his plush lips wrap around a thick shaft; dark pink and puffy. The way he keeps his eyes on mine the whole time, the swirls he makes with his tongue and the breaths that leave him, rumbles in his throat telling me how much he loves it.

It’s almost as magnificent as the sight of my brother’s ass squeezing the life out of my dick.

This *suck-n-fuck* game goes on for only another few minutes before I’m rushing to climax. Cyrus is making some choking noises, which means he’s

going to bust very soon. And the way Tauren's lashes are fluttering, it's safe to say we'll all be tumbling into orgasm in three… two…

"Fuck fuck fuck *yes*," I croak, pushing my cock as deep as humanly possible into my brother while it bursts, flooding him with my cum.

The muscles in Cyrus's ass are contracting on me so hard, I just know he's pouring himself into Tauren's mouth, also evident from the way Tauren's throat is dipping while he swallows. And finally, Tauren's eyes roll back, and he drops his head into Cy's thigh, holding his jaw with his hands while his hips slow and he spills into my brother's waiting mouth.

"Holy mother of God…" I sigh as everything spins around me and I rub Tauren's shoulders.

He pulls his lips off Cyrus, breathing heavily as he tugs himself out of Cy's mouth. First, he spins around to kiss Cyrus deep, their tongues tangling with one another's flavor. And then he comes up to me and holds my face, kissing me with all the affection I know is specific to Tauren.

The most important person who's ever come into our lives. Tauren changed *everything* for us. He was like a catalyst; a bridge between Cyrus and me, bringing us together in a way we weren't sure we ever could be.

He's responsible for all of this magic, and that's why I love him so damn much. That's why I'll always listen to him, and trust him. Because he'll never steer us wrong.

"You made the right call, perfect." He grins on my lips. And I know he's referring to the fun we just had, but in my mind, I'm thinking of something else.

"I know I did."



The sun is finally out!

When my eyes peel open this morning, there are actual rays of sunshine streaming in through the partially drawn curtains of our bedroom. I shoot up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Cy!" I whisper, crawling on top of him. "Cy, wake up!"

He groans and nestles himself deeper into Tauren's chest. I climb on top of both of them.

"Guys! The sun is out." I'm shimmying all over, paying no mind to the fact that we're naked and I'm rubbing my balls on them.

"Sweet, if you keep doing that, we won't be leaving this bed for at least three hours," Tauren rumbles, reaching for my naked hips.

"Hey, I listen to you all the time." I slide down his long muscular frame. "We've been waiting for sun to go on The Eye. Well, guess what? The sun is here!"

"Baby, it's early," Cyrus whines. "Is The Eye even open yet?"

"Doesn't matter. We'll get showered, have breakfast, and by the time we're done, The Eye will be ready for us." I leave a trail of kisses from Tauren's arm to Cyrus's shoulders. "Here comes the sun…" I start singing and Cyrus snorts.

"Your brother is making me crazy," Tauren teases, he and Cy still all tangled up in cuddles.

It's funny because usually I'm the one who likes to sleep in. Tauren is always up first, and Cyrus and I spend our mornings leisurely holding each other and rubbing our morning wood together.

But something about being in London makes me want to wake up early. It also could have to do with work.

Yes, you heard me right. Work. I have an actual job, so-to-speak. And I love it more than words.

In Australia, I recorded one of my songs and uploaded it to Spotify. At first, I did it just for fun. My songs were a part of me getting better, and celebrating finally being happy for the first time in ever. But as it turns out, people really loved the song. And even though I was wary, I created an Instagram account to share my music and my process.

I don't show my face and I go by *CBV*—Colson Becker Vance, not that anyone knows what the initials stand for. My followers ask all the time, but I'll never tell them.

Tauren absolutely loves it, but I have to remind him constantly that it's just a name, and we're not getting married. *Can you imagine…?*

Once we got to London, I decided to record and upload a few more songs. Tauren even turned the office of our townhouse into a studio for me. My following has really taken off, and I'm super pumped about it. I like

that I can be this mysterious, faceless figure with a sick voice that people love. It's kind of a dream come true.

So while I should definitely be working in some form today, either writing, recording, or fucking around on IG or TikTok, I would much rather spend our first sunny day in London screaming *fuck you* at the world from atop The London Eye.

"Come on, lazybones!" I smack them both on the ass and jump out of our king-sized bed that barely contains the three of us—*good thing we love sleeping on top of each other*. "First one in the shower gets my spectacular oral skills."

I smirk at the bed while both of their eyes snap open and they sit up. *I knew that would get them.*

Three hours later, we're out and about in London Town. As is just about everyone else, because as I mentioned, it's the first sunny day in weeks. The good thing is, there are enough people around that we can casually hold hands and no one will really notice.

It's exhilarating. Every time Tauren's fingers brush mine, my stomach tries to jump up into my throat. And when I reach around Tauren's waist and brush my brother's back, we both shiver.

After brunch along the Thames, we go straight to The Eye. The thing is really awesome. It's huge and pretty, and it's still a bit too chilly out for everyone else, so Cyrus and I don't have to wait more than ten minutes.

We're about to go up, but I stop, my head cocking at Tauren. "Come with us."

"What?" He shakes his head. "No way. This is your thing, the two of you. I just bring you here, remember?"

I laugh. "Yea, well… not anymore."

Cyrus gives Tauren his patented puppy dog eyes. "Yea, come on, T. It'll be romantic."

"And you can tell the world to fuck off with us," I add, and he laughs. "It's incredibly freeing."

"You bet it is, old chap!" Cyrus drawls and I scowl at him.

"Okay, I'll come if you promise to stop doing that." Tauren grins, following in after us.

"No promises," Cyrus mutters while we slink into our pod.

The Eye really lives up to its name. It's so high-up it really feels like you're in a giant eye, looking down on the rest of civilization. And once we

get to the top, Cyrus and I hold hands. And we flip our middle fingers at the world below.

“Fuck you, world!” I shout, laughing already.

“Fuck off!” Cyrus howls in his fake English accent.

Tauren is laughing so hard he’s snorting. It really is the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen.

He throws his middle finger up and shouts, “Fuck you all! I’m in love with Cyrus and Colson Becker!”

“Yea, and we’re in love with each other!” Cyrus hollers.

“And if you don’t like it, guess what…?” I gasp, and we all look at each other before bellowing out, “Fuck *YOU*!” At the top of our lungs.

And sure, it’s not exactly the same as the first time we did it, because inside a pod no one else can really hear you. But it’s the tradition. Coming up to the highest points all over the world and telling everyone, *I don’t give a good goddamn what you think about me. I’m me, whether you like it or not.*

It’s cathartic.

Of course, having Tauren with us turns the whole thing kind of sexual, and we end up making out and touching each other’s dicks until it swings back down to earth.

Once we’re out, we decide to wander around some more and enjoy the beautiful day.

“What do my lovely boys want to do next?” Tauren asks with his arm draped around Cyrus’s shoulder. It’s casual enough, but still. The *fuck-you-world* bit definitely gives confidence, even to someone like Tauren who’s already so assured as it is.

I’m wandering up ahead of them when a shop catches my eyes. *Bingo.*

“Hey, so… I have an idea.” My grin is wicked, causing Tauren and Cyrus to share a concerned look. “How about that?”

I point, and as soon as they see what I’m looking at, their eyes shimmer with excitement.

“What do you think, good twin?” I ask my brother, giving him a smirk as my fingers brush his in secret. “You wanna be bad?”

He bites his lip and looks to Tauren with pleading eyes. It’s sort of our dynamic. We both allow Tauren to reign his much-needed control over us, but whereas I like to push his buttons in hopes of some sweet punishment,

Cyrus is dead-eager to be on the receiving end of anything Tauren gives. It's actually really hot to witness.

Tauren growls. "What did I tell you about giving me that look in public, precious?" Cyrus simply flutters his lashes and I have to press my lips together to hold in my chuckles. Tauren looks at the shop once more. "If you want it, you got it, baby. You know we're down, but you're the only one of us who's still a virgin."

Cyrus shivers visibly. "I definitely want to get one with you." His eyes bounce between us.

"So it's settled!" I drag them toward the tattoo shop, elation sizzling in my veins. *I've been having ink withdrawals, so this is perfect.* "What are we going to get?"

"I have an idea," Cyrus says.

"Nothing Batman-related," I tell him, and he pouts.

Tauren rumbles, "Watching you two getting tattooed and not being able to touch will be like torture."

"Foreplay," I correct him.

Inside the shop, we decide on what we're getting together, and it's *perfect*.

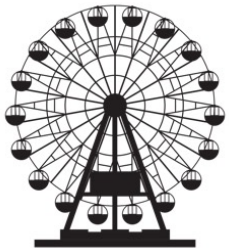
A reminder in flesh, holding us together like the deep bond we share in our souls. Something to always remind us of this adventure.

I'm sure we'll have to settle eventually, but right now the world is ours…

To sit on top of, and say, "Fuck you."

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CYRUS'S EPILOGUE



I have to admit, it's exciting.

Our plane is cruising through the atmosphere, getting lower, closer to our destination, somewhere we haven't been in nine months.

The good ol' US of A.

We left the states for our epic trip around the world to find the best Ferris wheels and scream our lungs out off of them. But also, to explore new settings and see new things. To focus on just being us, and not what society wants us to be. Or what they see us as.

Now we're coming back, and to the west coast of all places! Though we're not returning to California. Not just yet, anyway.

We're going to Seattle, to the Great Wheel. It's going to be a blast. Tauren set us up in a loft downtown, length of stay: undetermined. Just like the rest.

Honestly, I really thought I would have been more bummed about not going to college. After all, I've always loved school. Learning is such a part of me, mainly because I do it so easily, and being insanely smart is one of my best assets.

But if these trips, these adventures we've been on, have taught me anything, it's that learning comes in all different forms. And when it comes to knowledge, I don't have to get it from a professor. I can give it to myself.

Colson chuckles by my side, and I peek at him. "You wrote *give it to myself*."

"Can you please not read over my shoulder?" I grumble at him, pulling my journal away from his prying, perverted eyes.

“Sorry, G.” He kisses my cheek, and I can’t help but flush, eyes darting all over the place to make sure no one saw.

“Kids, no arguing please.” Tauren smirks, though his eyes are buried in the book he’s reading.

Colson shoves me one more time and I shake my head, biting the grin off my lip.

I’ve been writing in this journal for a few weeks now, and I really like it. I think writing might be something I’m interested in. I have a lot of knowledge on a bevy of different topics. Who’s to say I shouldn’t write it down and publish it?

The thing about the way we’re living our lives now is we’re sort of looking for ways to satisfy our need to work while also keeping our identities secure. I know the news surrounding our family scandal has fizzled, but all it would take is one of our names popping up attached to something to bring back the drama. The gossip, prying eyes, and lack of privacy on social media.

Colson is doing his music thing under an alias. And he never shows his face, which I think is super cool, and creative. It’s only been a few months and his following is huge; growing every day. I’m beyond proud of him, because this is something he’s always been good at. Something the haters never believed he could make into a career. And now he’s doing it.

As for me? I could publish books under a pen name. So that’s what I’m thinking about.

The captain comes over the speaker, announcing that we’re making our decent into SeaTac. I’m so excited I can’t stop fidgeting. That is, until Tauren leans into me and whispers, “Keep still, young man.”

Holy hell, this man knows exactly what few words to say to really crank my engine. I’m not even exaggerating. It’s actually sort of unnerving, how he can get my dick from zero to one hundred with something so very simple uttered in that sex-for-ears voice of his.

And now I really want to squirm because my balls are humming, but I can’t. I have to do as he says. Because he’s in charge.

Tauren has really come into his own with the whole causal Dom thing, which in turn allowed me to fall-in line, *pun intended*, with my submissive nature. The games we play together are fun and sexy, and the three of us seem to have built something so wildly and profoundly naughty that I think we’re bordering on obscene. But it works.

Because of one key factor; we're madly in love with each other.

The plane lands safely and we make our way into a car, and then to our elegant, luxury loft in Downtown Seattle.

"Holy crap on a cracker," Colson gasps, strutting through the wide-open floor plan, dropping his bags and spinning around. "This place is amazing!"

"Gorgeous," I add, checking out our fully furnished home. Everything is shiny and new, modern and elegant.

Quite the change from our little townhouse in London. Though, let's be real, I loved that place so damn much. Hence the reason we ended up staying over a month.

"No, my God!" Colson yelps, darting to the massive window with the most spectacular view of the city.

Rushing over to him, I can't help how my jaw drops. "This is… breathtaking."

Col slinks his arm around my waist, and I dip my head onto his shoulder while we take in the view, the sparkling lights of a new city. A new adventure.

The warmth of our man behind us sends the hairs standing up on the back of my neck. Tauren presses the wall of his muscular chest into us, folding his arms around both of our waists. His lips dance in our jet-black hair while he breathes us in.

"You love it?" he asks, his voice rumbling into us.

We both peer up at him.

"It's incredible, hero." Colson grins, the sparkling green love in his eyes such a sight to see.

"We love you, T," I whisper to him, and he hums.

He takes my chin and kisses me softly, then does the same to Colson. "I love you both. I can't even tell you how incredible these past months have been. You're every single thing to me."

"Oh boy, he's getting sappy. You know what that means." Colson smirks, his eyes flicking to mine. "This is where he proposes."

Tauren is obviously trying really hard to smother his smile.

"Look at his face!" Colson gasps. "He's probably about to drop down on one knee right now!"

I can't help the laughter that bubbles out of me. I love the power shift between Tauren and my brother. The way they tease and mess which each

other is pure *perfect*. They feed off of each other, just like how Tauren and I ebb and flow together.

Tauren aims a searing glare at my brother, pinning him in place. I witness Colson swallow hard, and chills zip down into my balls. *God, if I thought I was wound up on the plane, this is really getting me sprung.*

Tauren presses himself into Colson's ass, his hand sliding up to his throat from behind. The needy sound that gasps from Col's lips has my dick leaking in my jeans.

"But, perfect, I want *you* on your knees." Tauren's lips brush Colson's ear and he trembles visibly.

"Anything you want, Sir," Col breathes, arching into Tauren to press his ass back against him.

I'm going out of my mind already. Reaching down, I adjust my erection, whimpering and biting my lip to cover it. But of course, Tauren misses nothing.

His dark blue gaze turns on me, and he tilts his head, like a predator. It's the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen.

"Precious, you need to get that pretty cock of yours under control," Tauren croons, and I damn near orgasm in my pants, which would definitely prove his point.

"I'm s-sorry, Sir," I croak, melting under his blue glare.

He pulls off Colson. "I think you need a little correcting. What do you think, sweet love?" he asks Colson who simply blinks.

"I always like watching that," he hums.

I swallow hard. And before I know what's happening, Tauren is hauling me into his arms.

The fact that he's huge and strong, and can just toss me around like a rag doll, is so insanely hot, it only serves to work me up further while he carries me, slung over his shoulder like he's a hunter and I'm an animal he just killed in the wild.

And now he's going to eat me.

He brings me into the living room and plops down on the couch, draping me effortlessly over his lap. He unbuttons and unzips my jeans while barking at Colson, "Get me a scotch, please, sweet thing. There's a bottle in my suitcase."

"Yes, Sir." Colson scurries off to do what he says while Tauren brings my pants down, his large hands cupping my ass, gently squeezing and

massaging it until I'm melting beneath his palms.

My problem is, I can't even stop myself from humping his thigh while he rubs me. And his movements come to an abrupt halt.

"I told you earlier to keep still," he growls. "You really need some discipline tonight, precious. You're out of control."

"I'm… so sorry, Sir." I gulp, my cock painfully stiff between us.

His hands resume they're massaging. "It's okay, baby. I love how excited you get for me." I release a breath as Colson steps over with a glass of scotch. Tauren takes it and sips. "That said, I'm gonna need to spank you."

My spine stiffens, and my balls draw up in fear and eager, thrumming need.

"Colson, sit down please," Tauren says, and gives him the drink to hold. His hand pushes on the back of my head. "Head down, ass up."

My bare ass is propped and waiting for him, and I swear to God, I'm going to come so fast. *He's gonna be so mad.*

"What's our safe word?" he asks, running his fingers gently over my flesh. It's trickery; the soft before the pain.

"Gotham," I whimper and Colson shifts.

"Good boy," Tauren croons. And he wastes no time swinging his large palm down on my ass.

The slap is hard, and it takes me by surprise. The first one always does.

I gasp and lose my position a bit. And he scolds me, "Stay put." He smacks me again.

Breath whooshes from my lips on each hit, his hand strong and mean as it cracks against the meat of my cheek. On the right, then the left, then in between. By the tenth one, he's so close to my balls, I'm afraid he'll hit them.

Or maybe I really want him to…

"How are we feeling, bad thing?" he asks, his voice like gravel and silk.

"So good…" I gasp and he hits me harder. "*Sir!* Sir, Sir."

"Good boy." He rubs my ass gently, caressing the sting of pain on my ass cheeks that I just know are pink as fuck.

"Tauren—*Sir*… Can I please…" Colson is the one really squirming now.

"Use your words, baby," Tauren growls at him while his fingers slip between the crack of my ass to play with my hole.

My cock is leaking *everywhere*. It's a sticky mess.

"Can I please take my dick out?" Colson asks, the shiver noticeable in his voice.

"What do you think, precious? Do we want to see your brother's long, pink swollen cock?" His thumb probes me, just a bit and I shudder.

"Yes. Yes, Sir. I want to see it," I pant.

Colson whips his pants down so fast, he's like the Flash. Taking his rigid cock out, he strokes it gradually, balls to tip. My eyes sneak up to it and I lick my lips. It reminds me of the first time he jerked in front of me… all those years ago.

Tauren spanks my ass again and my eyes roll back. "Do you want to lick it?"

I nod fast. *Smack!* "Yes! Yes, Sir, *please*."

"Please what?" he growls. Another smack.

"I want to lick it, Sir," I cry, tears seeping from my eyes. "I want to suck on my brother's cock. Please, Sir. Please, baby."

Tauren groans quietly. He loves when I call him *baby*. Almost as much as he loves watching me and Colson together.

He shifts me so that I'm draped over his and Colson's laps. Then he fists my hair and guides my mouth down on my brother's perfect dick.

I suck right away, tasting his flavor and humming at how much I love it. A crack on my ass has me fumbling forward a bit, Colson's cock spearing my throat.

"God fucking damn…" Colson whimpers. "Cyrus, your mouth…"

"Keep sucking, precious," Tauren demands, smacking me again, and again while I suck on Col's firm flesh, long and hard. "When you make him come, you can come."

Okay, then. That's a challenge I know I can rise to.

I work my mouth up and down on Colson's dick, sucking and sucking while saliva dribbles from my mouth. When Tauren spanks me, I cough, the pain winding me up so tight I'm about to erupt.

But I can't.

It's like my body knows who it belongs to as much as I do. It listens to Tauren because he owns me. And I love every second of it.

"Suck harder, baby." Tauren lifts my hips, smacking me one more time before his hand runs down, cupping my balls, and then my cock.

I grunt on Colson’s dick, squeezing my eyes shut and focusing on not coming.

“That feels so fucking good.” Colson’s hips move up to me, chasing my mouth while I gulp him back.

Tauren collects my precum on his fingers, then brings them back, between my cheeks. “Good boy, precious. You look so good right now, taking care of us.” His finger pushes gently into my ass, burning me with no lube other than my own arousal.

I *love* it. He knows exactly what he’s doing. He’s taunting me… Trying to get me to come first, so he can punish me more.

And even though I love that idea all too much, I’m on a mission.

Clearing my head, I focus on my brother’s dick sliding in and out of my mouth, stuffing into the back of my throat as I swallow.

“Oh God, I’m gonna come,” Colson whispers. And then I suck, hard.

And he blows instantly.

I swallow pulse after pulse of his load, while grinding myself on Tauren’s lap. I’m writhing into him, the ache of my tender flesh, the friction of my cock on his clothed thighs, the burn and stretch of his finger in my ass…

It’s all too much. *I can’t hold on…*

And then Tauren whispers, “Come for me, precious.”

On fucking command, my dick erupts, throbbing streams all over him while I mumble and mewl on my brother’s softening cock. Colson’s hands are in my hair, and he lifts me off while I mumble nonsense, twirling and whimpering and grinding out every drop onto Tauren’s pants.

By the time I’ve come down, I barely remember where I am. Tauren shifts me, he and Colson rubbing my back and my ass and my shoulders… everywhere. And then they start kissing. And the next thing I know, I’m curled up on the couch with a blanket over me while Colson is kneeling between Tauren’s legs to get him off.

And I’m just… Warm.

I’m comfortable and happy. I’m in love, and nothing has ever been this perfect.



The next day, we go straight to the Big Wheel, because Colson doesn't want to wait. At the top, the three of us flip off Seattle and yell *fuck you*. We laugh and kiss and tell each other *I love you*, a lot. Because we do.

Stepping out of the pod, I admire the sight of black ink on my wrist. My first and only tattoo. We got them in London; matching ones. *Fuck 'em* in script.

"You're gonna want more," Colson tells me when he notices what I'm looking at. "It's addictive."

I grin and shrug. "Maybe."

My eyes move to Tauren, who's walking in front of us. And the letters *C&C* he has tattooed on his right bicep. He got it from the same shop in London, a few days before we left. It was so romantic when he showed it to us, I sort of burst into some very embarrassing tears. And then I rode his dick for an hour while Colson came in my throat twice.

Good times.

Tauren turns and grins at us. "Lunch?"

"Whatever you say, boss," Colson croons, and Tauren narrows his gaze at him. My brother simply smirks.

While the two of them are teasing each other, my phone rings. There's a sheet of peace over me, my smile easy as I answer it. "Hello?"

"This is a collect call from San Pedro Federal Prison." My heart stops dead. So do my feet. "From… *It's Dad*. Do you wish to accept?"

No!

But my mouth won't work right, and I don't know what to say. I'm frozen and confused and nervous.

So I mumble the word, "Yes," immediately regretting it.

"Hey! It's my son," the voice of my scumbag father croons over the phone into my ear, sliding into my brain like a deadly parasite. "The apple of my eye…"

"What do you want?" I grunt, blinking at Colson and Tauren, who are shoving each other around a few feet up the sidewalk.

“Hey now. Is that any way to greet your dear old daddy?” Dustin Becker says, and his voice sounds much more threatening than I remember. He sounds meaner. “All this time, and not a single visit… Not one fucking phone call?! Where’s the love, boy?”

I gulp down my fear. “No love for an abusive, asshole thief.”

“Ouch.” He chuckles. “I see you grew a backbone. Good. Look, I really called for one reason.”

“Oh, yea? And what’s that?” I seethe, hating that this asshole is ruining my mood. *And after we just said fuck you to the world!*

“I heard about what happened… All that bullshit with your brother.”

“*Bullshit*?” I growl. “You wanted to *drug the queer out of him*. Do you know how fucking small that makes you?”

He laughs. “Whoa! The baby’s got bite!”

“I’m not a fucking baby,” I hiss. “And in my opinion, the eighteen months they added to your sentence was nowhere near enough.”

“Calm down, kid,” he mutters. “It was nothing personal, you know? I don’t care if you like boys.”

“Right…”

“I just didn’t want the bad apple that shares your genetic makeup twisting it around on you. I’m sure you can understand…”

“Uh, no. I can’t.” My fist tightens. Tauren and Colson finally notice that I’m not following them, and they turn around, concern lining their features. “Colson is the other half of me, and you tried to kill him. As far as I’m concerned, you tried to kill me, too. So let me return the favor, *Dad*. You’re dead to me.”

I’m about to hang up when he barks, “Don’t hang up on me, you little shit.” My jaw clenches, and I know I should end the call. But for some reason, I keep listening. “Really, I just called to tell you one thing…”

Tauren and Colson wander over to me, shaking their heads, wondering who it is.

“I know you left California… And I know you and your brother have been gallivanting around with that smug prick Tauren Vance.”

I can’t help how dry my mouth gets. My wide eyes stay on Tauren’s while his head tilts.

“Baby, who is it?” he whispers.

“And I want you to deliver a message to that asshole,” Dustin growls. “I know he’s fucking my sons. And when I get out of here, he’s dead.”

My lips tremble as I force myself to grunt, “Fuck you. Come and get us, asshole.”

“Oh, trust me, boy. I will.”

And then he hangs up the phone, and I’m left standing in the crowded Seattle street with my head spinning.

“What happened?” Colson asks, placing his hands flat on my chest.

“That was Dad…” I mutter.

Both of their faces drop.

“What the hell did he want?” Colson’s face is as subtly worried as it is confused. After all, he has a much worse relationship with Dad than me.

“Just to fuck with us,” I mutter. “As usual.”

“Psshh.” Colson rolls his eyes.

Tauren rubs my back. “I’m sorry you had to deal with that, love.”

“He wanted me to give you a message,” I tell Tauren, shaking my head at the audacity of the dickhead who unfortunately made me.

“Oh yea?” Tauren grins. “And what’s that?” His eyes narrow. He looks scary like this. It’s hot as fuck.

“He said he knows you’re fucking us, and when he gets out of prison, you’re dead.” I blink up at Tauren, not knowing if I should laugh it off as a joke, or if I should be taking this much more seriously.

Tauren’s brow quirks. He peeks at Colson, who’s also just staring at him. And then he bursts into a loud booming laugh, the sight and sound of which thumps my heart and shivers my balls.

“I’ll look forward to meeting that waste of breath.” Tauren shakes his head and takes me by the arm. “Come on, baby. I agreed to let your brother pick the restaurant and guess what he wants…”

I laugh. “Oh God… Colson, really. You’re gonna have to get over it.”

“I can’t!” My brother gasps. “It’s the one thing I miss about California! Maybe they have decent ones here…”

I laugh out loud. He’s been talking about tacos since we left the states.

“Okay, well, lead the way, sweet.” Tauren sighs out his chuckles. “Let’s see how the Mexican food in Seattle holds up.”

The three of us walk together, brushing our fingers secretly, enjoying one another’s company. And I forget all about our bullshit father and his bullshit threats. Because we’re in a new, exciting place and there are so many things to do here. So many experiences to have that don’t include scumbag parental failures.

There’s a beautiful life ahead of us, open and ready to explore.

The thing about the past is that you have to overcome it to reach your true present; your *real* self. And whether or not anyone understands us, even if we’re met with nothing but scoffs and eye-rolls for the rest of our lives, it won’t matter.

We found what makes us happy. The person who brought *us* together, and held on. The hero who fell on his double-edged sword… and liked it.

At this point, it’s Tauren and Colson and Cyrus against the world.

And fuck anyone who doesn’t accept us for exactly how awesome we are.

The Double-End.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



Oooh, baby! How many panty-changes did we need with this one?? Any tears? Talk to me, goose.

I just need to start out by saying a big thank you to everyone who reads and loves this book. It was one of the most complicated writing experiences I've ever had, and I'm so beyond proud of how it turned out in the end. If you love this story and these characters, then you're my ride or die. You get it.

And I fucking *love* that.

This book is obviously complicated. I mean… the subject matter alone is enough to make tons of people balk like I'm disgusting for even considering writing something like this. To be honest, that just makes me want to write it even more. But I won't go there right now.

I just hope you were able to appreciate the characters here, because this is the most character-driven story of mine since Lazarus. Sure, there are things going on. Like Dustin being arrested and the family assets being seized, the move back to Solana, Carla finding out, the graduation bullshit, and everything with Dr. Roberts… It's actually a shit-ton of drama, but even so, the way we experience it is through the lens of these characters.

At first glance, it sort of seems like Cyrus and Colson are more of the main protagonists than Tauren, or at least that the story revolves more around them than it does him. Of course, he's equally important to their relationship. But I also see him as the wicked savior of the story. That's why we refer to him as the hero, or the *dark knight* so often—which I'll talk about more in a minute.

Tauren, and his inner qualities he's been stuffing down all his life, sort of mirror exactly what the twins are dealing with the whole time. Their secret attraction to one another, the things they know they shouldn't want…

That picture of a perfect, rich family with moral corruption beneath the cellophane surface.

Then Tauren rides in like the knight on a white horse, and in many ways, he *is* the savior, even if it contradicts what society deems as *right*.

There's a constant juxtaposition between right and wrong in this story, which is one of my favorite things to play with in my books. Even between Cyrus and Colson, their personalities… Cyrus as the good twin, and Colson as the bad. But when you get down to their cores, and unlock the stuff they keep bottled up tight, their desires and wants, needs, you come to find it's quite the opposite. Maybe Colson is actually more good than he wants to let on. And Cyrus is very bad underneath. Or at least, he feels that way.

These are the things Tauren's character represents, as well. This ever-present contradiction, in all of them, is very important. The point is that everyone wears a mask. And sometimes we shield our true selves from even *ourselves*.

And I'd like to point out, in case you didn't pick up on it, the intense similarities between Tauren's situation and his father's. For example, the headlines, and being ostracized by the community for his actions.

Now, Batman. First of all, the Caped Crusader is Cy's favorite superhero because he's mine. I've always been a Batman fan, so when Cyrus came to me as the nerdy, comic book fan he is, I just knew he was going to have a thing for the dark knight.

Batman is a superhero, yes, but he's always been viewed as both good and bad. He's the vigilante hero, after all. People fear and loathe him as much as they call for his help. And I've always loved that idea, being hated and loved as one in the same. Underdogs are just the best in my opinion, and Batman is definitely one. He needs to be hated in order to save Gotham…

Just like Tauren needed to be hated in order to save the boys.

You might be thinking, *Nyla… That's a stretch. Did Tauren really* save *the boys? Or did he just want to screw them?*

Well… Both.

Of course, Tauren fell for Cyrus and Colson in ways he never expected, which I just love. My favorite thing about forbidden romance is the

unexpected slap in the face it gives the characters when they discover their latent feelings. But also, he was the perfect person to swoop in and rescue them from a life that would never have been truly fulfilling to either of them. Think about it…

If Tauren never came along, would Cyrus and Colson have ended up together? Probably not. They might have still hooked up in secret, but no one can make that happen forever. Also, they might never have truly figured out how evil Carla was, and how much Colson needed the help he wasn't getting.

Tauren's hero complex was just a front all along. It was his mask; a way for him to give himself the control he so craved, without ever having to truly release it from its chains. And even though it might seem a bit creepy, I think on an unconscious level, he knew when he proposed to Carla that he was doing it for the boys. I definitely don't think it started out sexual in nature. I think he honestly just wanted to get closer to them. To help them, because they so clearly needed it.

And that brings me to another point… The mental health issues. Colson obviously comes to mind first. And yes, his problems are quite severe. But I also want to mention Cyrus's social anxiety, which was hard for me to write at times.

I'm someone who suffers from anxiety. No, it's not to the level that Cyrus experiences it, with how crippling it can be for him to talk to people, make friends, etc. But I did take a lot of my own experiences and display them through Cyrus. I think it's why I feel so strongly for him. He's the ultimate introvert, to an almost unhealthy degree. It even prevented him from coming out, which pained my heart to go through with him. I think that's why he latches onto stronger personalities. Colson, sure, but also Tauren.

Tauren's dominance over Cyrus is the perfect outlet for his anxiety. He's used to his mind running a mile a minute. To be able to turn his brain off and let his body tell him what it needs is very helpful.

And then, there's the bad twin.

Oh, *Colson*. My heart. My heavy, aching heart for this brutal, beautiful boy. He's the other piece of me… The angry, emo side. The side who feels unseen and unheard. I couldn't help but get emotional for Colson so often, and not just when he was dealing with his episodes. If there's anything I can relate to, it's wanting to tell the world, tell *everyone*, to fuck off, but then

also just needing *someone*. Someone in control to tell you what to do. To heal you because you don't feel worthy of the love you crave so deeply. And I think Colson was looking for that in anybody, which is why he fell so easily into listening to Dr. Roberts.

It's not that he wanted to, but he *needed* some direction. It wasn't until he unwittingly let Tauren in that he realized it.

Now, I know a few people very close to me who suffer from Bipolar Disorder, of varying types. So it was hugely important for me to display this accurately. But also, to bring up something as serious as misdiagnosis. Of course, this story shows an extreme example, but it's something that happens all the time. I've known people who had to try dozens of different meds before they found what works best for them, for their chemistry. And it's a struggle.

Colson's self-awareness came while he was still a bit fucked up from the side-effects of all the unnecessary meds. The clarity he experienced when he came out of the coma was so refreshing, after everything he'd been through. So much about writing his attempts at suicide snapped my heart in half. But no matter how much it hurts, everything does happen for a reason.

Okay, moving onto some quick Easter eggs…

First off, I need to tell you that Tauren's best friends and business partners are actually named after my best friends in the whole world, Scott and Brad. I'm not sure if they'll ever read this, but if they do, check it out, you guys! I made you straight at first. LOL.

Next, is the reference of Tauren going to see The Used and My Chemical Romance live. That was actually taken from my real life. Seeing Bert and Gerard perform *Under Pressure* live was one of my all-time favorite concert-going experiences.

And then of course, we have Luthor...

If you haven't started the Alabaster Penitentiary series, you won't get this reference. But for those who are fans... I mean, I squealed the entire time I was writing that. Obviously, this book takes place before Lexington Deon is arrested and sent to Alabaster Penitentiary. So who knows... Maybe Cyrus will show up in Luthor's book (*Fragments*). Insert evil face emoji here.

I also want to mention Colson's song, *Bad Hero Baby*. I need to tell you, I've always loved writing lyrics. I'm not a musician, so I don't know how to turn them into an actual song, but writing lyrics is something I've

always enjoyed doing. I was beyond pumped to incorporate it into this book, written by none other than CBV, the sexy, faceless musician blowing up the scene. ;)

I'm sure I could go on and on, more than I already have, but I won't. I just hope that you've been able to tell how important these characters are to me, and how much their story changed the way I think about my writing, and this job. Sometimes creating is a massive struggle. Sometimes the things you love can take a toll on you, but that doesn't mean it's *bad*. Nothing in this world is only good, or only bad.

Life is far-too complex to define that way. Which is why I'd call this a complicated happily ever after. Because even though the three of them are together, and having fun… It's not easy, and it never will be. I think expecting a relationship between two brothers to be easy would be inherently naïve. Things will never be simple for them the way they are for other couples.

But that's okay. They're going to fight for it, because love is worth it. Love in *any* form.

The most important message from this book, which I hope you'll take away, is that right and wrong are constructs, and imperfections are fucking beautiful.

Perfect is overrated, anyway. And there's something so powerful in throwing your middle finger at the world and telling it to fuck off.

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Wow. I have so many people to thank on this one.

I'll start with my family and friends. Obviously, you know who you are lol. You guys are always here for me when I need you, and I'm so damn appreciative of that. I know when I'm writing a really complicated book, I turn into a bit of a disaster. But you never judge me. You don't fight with me, or tell me to give it up. You're fucking proud of me, even knowing what I write about, and it's just amazing. Because I know a lot of people who aren't so supportive, to my friends and colleagues, and even to me. I'm not stupid. I know what kinds of comments people make about readers and writers of smutty romance. And despite the bullshit spouted by the haters, you're still proud of me. Which is awesome, because I'm fucking proud of myself, for giving exactly zero fucks about what people think. Basically, I'm just so thankful to have a family like you in my corner. And anyone who has shit to talk can catch our middle fingers.

To my editor, Kay, the person most dedicated to my words I've ever met, for someone who's not even a part of the romance community at all lol. You are such a boss, it's not even funny. You slayed this one with me. Thank you for not having me committed when I came to you 80k in and said I wanted to change the entire structure of the book and write seven new chapters at the beginning. Because really, you could have. I'm sure a facility would have gladly taken me in the state I was in. But it wasn't necessary because of you. Because even though I'm your only client (your only *author* client), you do *fucking work*. You and I truly mesh on this, which is why I'll never leave you. And you already know I'm not letting you escape. I'm like herpes, baby. You've got me for life.

Amber… My PA and the person who has become one of my best friends in the world… Girl, you are so important to me. No matter what happens, I'm keeping you. Thank you so much for being endlessly supportive, talking me off ledges and just LOVING my words, so much that you can't even really read anything else lol. I promise I'll keep writing

brooding, sexy boys who kiss each other for you to fall endlessly in love with.

Mackenzie from Nice Girl, Naughty Edits… Babe, I'm forever obsessed with you. Thank you for being my ride or die. Thank you for listening to my ramblings when I'm going crazy with the piled-up thoughts in my head. Thank you for perfecting my babies, and for just being generally awesome in every single way. I truly value the shit out of you, and you ain't leaving me, EVER, so buckle up and settle in.

Leila Reid, also known as the wizard behind Moonshine Creations for making this fantastic cover, graphics, and just being an overall spectacular human. My DMD baby roasted chicken! I absolutely love you, and I'm being serious. Thank you so much for making this boss cover, and for being such a great friend. I can't wait to squeeze you in NOLA!

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The Flipping Hot Street Hoes, you guys are always number one in my book. Infinite thanks for always hyping me, and for loving my words no matter what. I wouldn't be able to do any of what I do without you queens.

And to my readers… All of you. Bloggers, bookstagrammers, booktokkers… Whether you're on Facebook, or Instagram, whether you're a quiet one, or one who tags me and messages me all the time. To those who shout about my babies from the rooftops, there's no possible way I can tell you how much you mean to me. Your love is what drives me, what keeps me going when things feel impossible. When I'm struggling with my words, and wondering if all this fucking stress is worth it, I just think about you. I remember the messages and the beautiful edits, and the amazingly kind words… And I smile. I pick my pen back up and keep hustling and I do it for you. For everything I give you, you give me it back in triplicate. I love and value each and every one of you.

Thanks for riding with me, always. Your glitter queen has oh so much more in store for you. ;)

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RESOURCES



If you or anyone you know is struggling, reach out to:
800-273-8255 - Suicide Prevention Hotline

Project Healthy Minds - End the stigma on mental health

It Gets Better Project for LGBTQ+ youth and allies, etc.

The Trevor Project for LGBTQ youth in crisis

There's no shame in getting help. Talk to someone.
My ears are here for you!
(contact info on the About The Author page).

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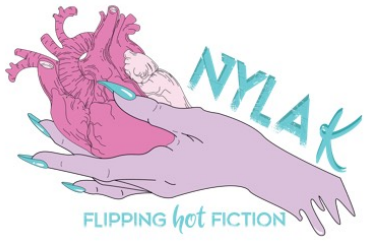
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hi, guys! I'm Nyla K, otherwise known as Nylah Kourieh; an awkward sailor-mouthed lover of all things romance, existing in the Dirty Lew, up in Maine, with my fiancé, who you can call PB, or Patty Banga if you're nasty. When I'm not writing and reading sexy books, I'm rocking out to Machine Gun Kelly and YUNGBLUD, cooking yummy food and fussing over my kitten (and no, that's not a euphemism). Did I mention I have a dirtier mind than probably everyone you know?

I like to admire hot guys (don't we all?) and book boyfriends, cake and ice cream are my kryptonite. I can recite every word that was ever uttered on *Friends*, *Family Guy*, and *How I Met Your Mother*, red Gatorade is my lifeblood, and I love to sing, although I've been told I do it in a Cher voice for some reason. I'm very passionate about the things that matter to me, and art is probably the biggest one. If you tell me you like my books, I'll give you whatever you want. I consider my readers are my friends, and I welcome anyone to find me on social media any time you want to talk books or sexy dudes!

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